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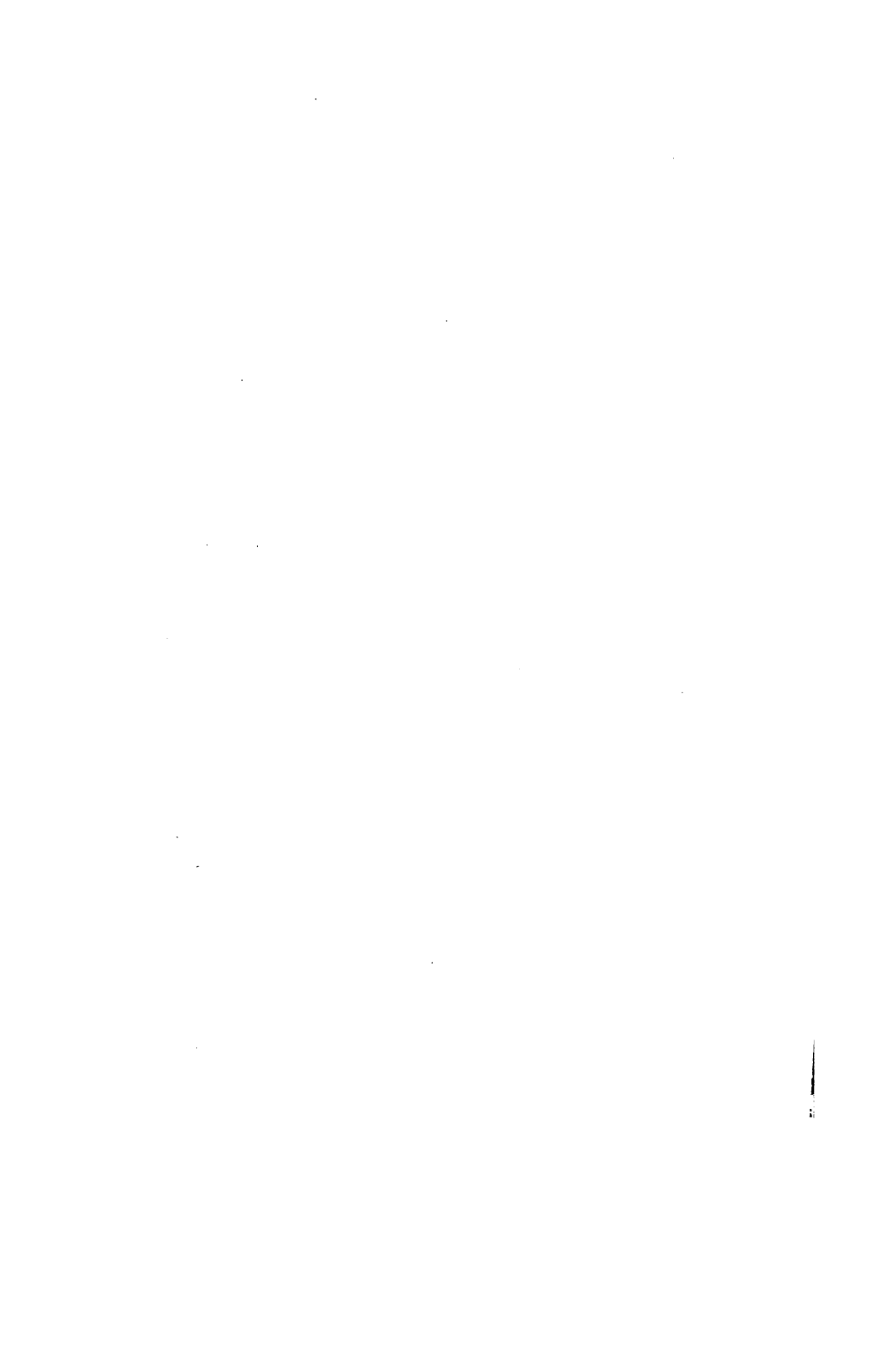
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ARTES SCIENTIA VERITAS



AWAS-I-HIND,
OR
A VOICE FROM THE GANGES;
BEING
A SOLUTION OF THE TRUE SOURCE
OF
CHRISTIANITY.
BY
AN INDIAN OFFICER.

"Reason is the only faculty we have wherewith to judge concerning anything, even REVELATION itself; for if it contain clear immoralities or contradictions,—either of these would prove it false."—(*Butler's Analogy.*)

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TO THE READER.

On the banks of the Sacred Ganges, the *Gunga-Jul* of the Hindoos, and surrounded by millions of people who never heard of Jesus or the Gospels, but who worshipped other prophets and other gods,—the monotonous tedium of an Indian officer's life has been passed in a critical examination of the Christian religion. His inquiries have been chiefly directed to two principal questions,—who was this person called Jesus? and from what source were the doctrines derived which he promulgated?

In this inquiry, truth has been the only object in view; and the only means of arriving at the truth, a careful study of the facts of the subject, in conformity with the laws of reason and the teachings of experience.

We are told by the Scriptures themselves, that we should receive no doctrine as true unless it be supported by substantial evidence ; that we should prove all things before we believe anything ; and be always ready to give a satisfactory answer of the grounds of our faith, and a reason of the hope that is in us.

We feel assured, that all that the subject requires is, a perfect willingness to come to such conclusions only as the evidence shall require, and to be guided by such evidence only as would influence us in any other case.

It must be borne in mind, that man is not responsible for his belief, for belief does not depend on volition, but on evidence. “ When, says Lord Brougham, evidence is presented to the mind, belief is not a voluntary, but a necessary consequence ; so that it is quite impossible that the mind should believe otherwise than as evidence is or is not discerned.” Yet, strange to say, few people in their religious inquiries act upon this principle ; their strongest efforts being directed to the discovery of *new* grounds for adhering to *old* opinions.

It is true, that investigation may awaken doubts where none before existed ; but why should this be deemed undesirable ? If an opinion be *false*, we ought not to continue to hold it,—if *true*, it can never suffer in the end from inquiry.

A great deal of invective has been levelled at free-thinking ; but all that we have to attend to in thinking is, to distinguish between what is accurate and inaccurate, true and false ; for thinking can never be too free provided it be just.

Should we have the misfortune to displease any of our readers by the freedom of our remarks in the following pages, we shall much regret it ; but it would be impossible altogether to avoid it, without sacrificing our mental independence, and our hopes of being useful.

Taking then as our guide the directions of St Paul, in proving all things, and holding fast that which is good, we can have no difficulty in arriving at just conclusions, and no reason for distrusting the consequences.

CALCUTTA,
January 25th, 1861.



CONTENTS.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. ANALYSIS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT	1
II. GENEALOGY OF JESUS	5
III. MIRACULOUS CONCEPTION	7
IV. BIRTH OF JESUS	12
V. MURDER OF THE INNOCENTS	16
VI. JESUS' VISIT TO THE TEMPLE	22
VII. JESUS' INTERREGNUM	25
VIII. BAPTISM OF JESUS	27
IX. THE TEMPTATION SCENE	32
X. JESUS THE MESSIAH	35
XI. RETROSPECT	39
XII. DOCTRINES OF THE ESSENIANS	41
XIII. SERMON ON THE MOUNT	50
XIV. JESUS' DISCOURSES AND SAYINGS	61
XV. THE LORD'S PRAYER	80
XVI. THE LAST JUDGMENT	87
XVII. PARABLES OF JESUS	89
XVIII. ON MIRACULOUS POWERS	99

CHAP.	PAGE
XIX. THE MIRACLES OF JESUS	106
XX. THE PROPHECIES	131
XXI. JESUS IN HIS PROPHETIC CHARACTER	142
XXII. PROPHECIES AND MIRACLES AS TESTS OF A TRUE RELIGION	148
XXIII. PROPHECIES OF JESUS' DEATH	151
XXIV. PROPHECIES OF THE RESURRECTION	155
XXV. JUDAS THE BETRAYER	158
XXVI. THE AGONY SCENE	161
XXVII. ARREST OF JESUS	165
XXVIII. PETER'S DENIAL	167
XXIX. JESUS' TRIAL	169
XXX. CRUCIFIXION	173
XXXI. RESURRECTION	179
XXXII. DID JESUS DIE ON THE CROSS?	182
XXXIII. ORIGIN OF CHRISTIANITY	185
XXXIV. REVIEW OF THE PROGRESS OF CHRISTIANITY ..	195
XXXV. REVIEW OF THE PRESENT STATE OF CHRISTIANITY ..	208

INTRODUCTION.

THE strange delusion, in the minds of the Jewish nation, that their God Jehovah had separated himself from all the world, and limited His saving grace to a small section of people living in Palestine ; that he had given them that country as a "perpetual possession," and had ratified it by a covenant, that they should be His chosen people FOR EVER, and he would be their God,—this idea seemed never to have deserted them. In the midst of all their misfortunes they most pertinaciously clung to these vain promises of their priests ; and their poets (called by them *prophets*, and believed to be divinely inspired) encouraged them by the most extravagant descriptions of their future prosperity and greatness. They declared, that Jehovah, whenever his chosen people suffered oppression, would raise up a Messiah or anointed deliverer, who would restore them to liberty, independence, and prosperity. Such a Messiah was Moses, who delivered them from Pharaoh ; such was David, who vanquished their worst enemy, the Philistines ; such was Elijah, who overthrew the idolatrous worship of Baal ; and such was Ezra, who led them back from captivity.

The Kings of Judah were termed the Lord's Anointed, and therefore the expected restorer of the throne of David came to be described as the Anointed or Messiah. But let

it be borne in mind, that the Jewish belief in a Messiah never extended beyond a *temporal* deliverance from the Roman yoke by a descendant of David. The idea of a *spiritual* Messiah was never entertained or thought of till after the death of Jesus, when it was adopted by his followers to relieve themselves from the awkward dilemma of reconciling their crucified master with the lofty pretensions of the promised Messiah.

Again, the Messiah was to come of the race of David, and, as a second David, to take possession of the throne of Israel; therefore it was expected that he, like David, should be born in Bethlehem.

In the old national legends, the prophets were made illustrious by the most wonderful actions and destiny; less could not be expected of the Messiah. It was therefore considered requisite by his followers, that Jesus also should be adorned with all that was glorious and important in the lives of the prophets.—In fine, the whole Messianic *Æra* was expected to be full of signs and wonders; the eyes of the blind were to be opened, the ears of the deaf unclosed, the lame should walk, the lepers be cleansed, and the dead raised. Hence this state on earth came to be popularly called the “Kingdom of God” and the “Kingdom of Heaven.”

These merely figurative expressions (says Strauss) soon came to be understood literally; and thus the idea of a Messiah came to be filled up with new ideas and new details, even before the time of Jesus. Many of the legends related of him had not to be newly invented,—they already existed in the popular idea of a Messiah, having been mostly derived from the Old Testament, and had merely to be transferred to Jesus, and accommodated to his character and doctrines. Such things must have happened to the Messiah, Jesus was the Messiah,—therefore they happened to him.

If we consider the firm conviction of the disciples, that all which had been prophesied of the Messiah in the Old Testament must *necessarily* have been fulfilled in the person of Jesus, we can easily understand, that his followers would have little hesitation in filling up the meagre outlines of Jesus' obscure life with the many legends, miracles, and wonders that were at the time in existence; especially when we bear in mind that, under the religious excitement of the times, the line of distinction between facts and fiction, prose and poetry, was but little understood and less attended to.

Let us repeat, that the greater part of the legendary stories, introduced in the Gospels to illustrate the life of Jesus, did not originate during that period; for the first foundation was laid in the legends of the Old Testament, the transference of which to the expected Messiah was easy, and they were accordingly applied to Jesus after his death. So that during the period of the formation of the first Christian community and the writings of the Gospels, it required but the transference of these legends to Jesus, with merely some alterations, to adapt them to the peculiar opinions and circumstances of the times.

The Jews latterly had imbibed many new religious ideas from the schools of the Pythagorean and Platonic philosophy. The effect of this was to give birth to a variety of sects, all tinged with the peculiar doctrines of these schools. The chief of these were the Sadducees, who took the literal interpretation of Scripture, and, like Moses and the Patriarchs, did not believe in a future state;* the Pharisees, who adopted the allegorical sense of Scripture, and believed in the

* See Bishop Warburton's "Divine Legation of Moses."

transmigration of souls; and the Essenians, who were of the Platonic school, and believed in the resurrection of the soul and a life after death.

These last, the Essenians, were eminent for the simplicity and moral purity of their lives. Their temperance, their benevolence, their chastity and piety are highly extolled by all the writers of the times. They gave all their worldly goods to feed the poor, lived solely on alms, and occupied all their time in going about, exhorting and instructing the people. But we shall have to draw the reader's attention more particularly to this sect, and their intimate connexion with the introduction of Christianity, when we enter on an examination of the doctrines attributed to Jesus.

It was in the midst of these conflicting sects, that the idea of the immediate coming of the Messiah arose. Josephus, the historian and a Pharisee, states, however, "that the belief of the Jews in the advent of the Messiah was a *vulgar error*, which originated in an ambiguous oracle or prophecy found in their sacred books." Tacitus, the Roman historian, confirms this statement, and the famous Rabbi, Hillel, who flourished at the end of the second century, affirms, "that the belief in a Messiah was no fundamental article of the Jewish religion, and depended merely on tradition; for that the prophet Isaiah expressly declares, that "beside God there is no Saviour."

"I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, THY SAVIOUR : before Me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the Lord; and BESIDE ME THERE IS NO SAVIOUR." (Isaiah xliii. 8, 10, 11.)

The progress of events, however, did not correspond with the flattering prophecies of the Old Testament, and the dissatisfied and degraded state of the Jewish nation.

under the Roman yoke, naturally excited in all ranks a desire to regain their liberty and their country. This led them to seize on every circumstance, however trifling, which seemed to indicate relief. Hence the number of pretenders to the Messiahship that appeared about this time, and hence the reason why they all succeeded in drawing after them so many ignorant and infatuated followers.*

A passage in the prophecies of Malachi had announced, that Elijah would appear again on earth, as the forerunner of the promised Messiah. An enthusiast of the Essenian Sect, named John, in imitation of Elijah, assumed the dress and manner of the expected prophet, and appeared in the desert near Jordan, calling on the people to repent and be baptized, for the kingdom of heaven was at hand. This produced much excitement, and crowds came to submit to this "baptism of repentance for the remission of sins," and which was supposed to precede the immediate advent of the Messiah.

Among others (according to the Gospel narratives) came one Jesus, the reputed son of Joseph, a poor carpenter of Nazareth, who, following the example of John, went about the country, exhorting the people, and warning them to repent. In this course, it is stated, he persevered for nearly two years, till the authorities, fearing some commotion, had him seized, summarily tried as a seditious person and blasphemer, and executed.

* Among these were Judas, son of Ezekias, Simon Athronges, and many other aspirants to the throne of David. But the most remarkable was that of Judas, the Galilean, who was both a political and a religious reformer, and who persuaded the people into the belief of his Messiahship, and successfully resisted for a long time the Roman authorities.

The history of this person was narrated by four anonymous Gospel writers, some forty to eighty years after his execution, but is not recorded by any of the historians of the times; it is nowhere mentioned except in these four Gospels, of which we are about to enter on a careful analysis.

During the 1st and 2nd centuries there began to appear a variety of anonymous narratives regarding this supposed person, detailing the events of his life with his sayings and doings, and which were promulgated by a new religious Sect under the name of Ebionites or Nazarenes, but who are conjectured to have belonged to the Sect of the Essenians, from the close similarity of their doctrines, manners, and habits. From these were selected (in the 4th century) the Epistles and four Gospels, which go by the name of the New Testament.

"It is an undoubted fact, however (says Bishop Faustus), that the New Testament was not written by Christ himself, nor by his apostles, but a long while after these times (*longo post tempore*) by some unknown persons, who, lest they should not be credited, when they wrote of affairs they were little acquainted with, affixed to their works the names of apostles, or of such as were supposed to have been their companions—and then said they were written "according to them." (*Faust. lib. 2.*)

These Gospels, declared to be written by the inspiration of God, are found, nevertheless, to be in the same doubtful and unsatisfactory state as the Old Testament. They have no author's name, no date, and no authentication how, or by what means, the writers came by the strange and improbable stories they narrate. They are not even written in the language of the country where these things are said to have occurred; but in most obscure and corrupt Greek, "a bar-

barous idiom," as Campbell calls it; shewing, at least, that the writers were not inspired with the gift of tongues.*

Nearly 2000 years ago, when it is asserted that these things occurred, all knowledge was handed down either by tradition or by the slow and laborious process of writing, which art was confined to a very few, and in Christendom exclusively to the monks, who corrected, and altered, and vitiated their copies of the New Testament according to their fancies, their faith, or their faction.

It appears that, at the Council of Laodicea (A. D. 363) there were 200 varied versions of the adopted Evangelists, and 54 several Gospels, all differing essentially from each other, and all purporting to be a true account of this person Jesus; and from these our four Gospels were selected. But be it remembered, that the present Gospels are not *originals*, but taken from copies of the 6th century, from some other unknown copies; *for there are no copies in existence, nearer the time of Jesus, than 500 years!*

A careful perusal must lead the reader to hesitate in ascribing to these Gospels the character of a faithful narrative of facts; and that impression is confirmed by meeting with numerous stories, which bear the strongest marks of fiction. They present no character by which we can distinguish them from the fictions, which every other religion has exhibited in its behalf.

When therefore we meet with accounts of certain

* "The Scripture Greek (says Bishop Middleton) is utterly rude and barbarous, and abounds with every fault that can possibly deform a language; whereas we should naturally expect to find an 'inspired language' pure, clear, noble, and affecting, even beyond the force of common speech, since nothing can come from God but what is perfect in its kind. In short, we should expect the purity of Plato, and the eloquence of Cicero." (*Essay on the Gift of Tongues.*)

phenomena or events, of which it is either expressly stated or implied, that they were produced *immediately* by God himself, as divine apparitions, voices from heaven, angels or devils in human shape, and the like ; or by human beings possessed of supernatural powers, as miracles, prophecies, &c.,—such accounts are, in so far, to be considered as *not historical*.

Historical veracity did not seem of much importance to the Gospel writers in their zeal and anxiety to carry out their new religion. "He only is a liar" (says John) "who denieth Jesus to be the Christ." (1 Epist. ii. 22.) Nor does John even pretend that his Gospel was written in order to give a correct history of Jesus ; for he says, "These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name." (xx. 31.) To communicate this his belief to others was his main object, considering, as all his successors have done in their efforts to carry out this object, that the end sanctified the means.

"It greatly affects me, (says the learned Casaubon,) to see how many there were, in the earliest times of the Church, who considered it a holy task to lend to heavenly truth the help of their own inventions, in order that the New Revelation might be more readily admitted by the wise among the Gentiles. These officious lies, they declared, were devised for a good end,—from this source sprung up innumerable books, published under the name of the Lord Jesus Christ."

There is a difference, however, between the fictions of these writers and ordinary cases of false testimony, namely, that they supposed themselves to be writing under the influence of the Holy Spirit. "But the Comforter," (says Jesus,) "*which* is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all

things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." (John xiv. 26.) Now these Gospel writers naturally considered the offspring of their fancy and imagination as the dictates of the Holy Ghost; and they accordingly attributed to Jesus their own views and opinions without any consciousness of fraud. With such an earnest purpose as the *Gospel writers* had in view, namely, to prove Jesus to be the Messiah, they would be led on, not only to mingle truth with falsehood, but even to fall into the persuasion that the Holy Ghost permitted such additions, as they could not but know were the *purest fictions*.

It is generally supposed, that Matthew's Gospel was written first, and Mark and Luke copied from him, and in some instances almost *verbatim*. They have, however, shaken Matthew's general credibility, by omitting several important parts, and rejecting many of his most prominent miracles.

The first three Gospels agree well enough in the style of the discourses attributed to Jesus, which are parables and short pithy sayings, and represent him as beginning his career in Galilee, proceeding to Jerusalem and suffering there. Their chief topics are, the fall of Jerusalem and the approach of the kingdom of heaven. But John's Gospel, supposed to have been written some time in the second century, and strongly characterized by the Platonic philosophy, is of a very different character. The discourses of Jesus are here long controversial orations, without any parables; he is made to journey from Galilee to Jerusalem and back again many times; the kingdom of heaven is nearly lost sight of; the fall of Jerusalem never alluded to; and several new topics are introduced, as the Incarnation of "the Word," or Plato's *Logos*, applied to Jesus; his coming down from heaven; his relation to the Father; the promise of the Comforter; and *an entire new set of miracles*.

This Gospel (says Hennell) appears to be the attempt of a half-educated but zealous follower of Jesus, to engraft his conceptions of the Platonic philosophy on the original faith of the disciples.—“The Jesus depicted in the 4th Gospel is wholly and entirely a different sort of character from the Jesus of Matthew, Mark, and Luke; so that it is utterly impossible that both descriptions can be true.” (*Britschneider in Ord. arg.*)—Bishop Marsh observes, “that after all his attempts to reconcile John’s account of the resurrection with that of Mark and Luke, he has not been able to do it in a manner satisfactory to himself, or to any other impartial inquirer into truth.” (*Marsh’s Michaelis.*)—Indeed many Christian writers reject John’s Gospel altogether, as totally unworthy of credit.*

The ordinary notion, that the four Gospels were written by the persons whose names they bear, has no foundation in truth, and has now been given up by all Christian writers. And here the previous admission of Bishop Faustus is conclusive, and shews, that the Christian world has been all along kept in most strange and suspicious ignorance on this subject.

* The chief objections to the authenticity of John’s Gospel are the following;—the unsuitableness of the discourses of Jesus, of the Baptist, and of the Jews, and their extreme difference of character from those in the other Gospels; fictitious stories, or such an admixture of facts and fiction as shew, that the writer was neither a companion of Jesus nor an eye-witness; ignorance of the geography, customs, and mode of thought of Judea, and to such an extent as to shew, that the writer was not even a native of Palestine. So that if John even be admitted to be the author of the Gospel, it becomes inevitable to charge him with wilful fiction, or at least with indulging in his imagination, at the expense of his memory, to such an extent as to be equivalent to it.

“Although the Gospels are to be received as the compositions of Jews, contemporaneous and even witnesses of the scenes and actions they describe, yet these compositions do nevertheless betray so great a degree of ignorance of the geography, statistics, and circumstances of Judea at the time supposed, as to put it beyond all question, that the writers were neither witnesses nor contemporaries,—neither Jews nor inhabitants of Judea.” (Rev. E. Evanson.)

We now proceed to examine the work itself in detail, and on its own merits; and see whether, from internal or external evidence, it exhibits the mark and seal of truth or true godliness.

8

AWAS-I-HIND,

OR

A VOICE FROM THE GANGES.

CHAPTER I.

ANALYSIS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

IN every civilized country, the popular system of theology has invariably claimed its origin from Divine Revelation. The priests of antiquity had their augurs and oracles; the Chinese had their inspired teachers, Confucius and Fohé; the Hindoos had their sacred books derived from the supreme god Brahma; the followers of Mahomed had their Koran, dictated by the angel Gabriel; and the Jews declared their religion was written by the finger of God himself, to be perfected by the advent of a mighty prince or Messiah, of the race of David, who would sit on the throne of Jacob, and restore the kingdom to Israel.

Now as Christianity is reformed Judaism, with the assumption, that the person mentioned in the New Testament, as Jesus of Nazareth, is the promised Messiah, foretold by the Jewish Scriptures; so, in entering on an examination of this work, our first step must necessarily be

to ascertain, whether the prophecies of the Old Testament have been truly fulfilled in the person of Jesus, and that he is, in reality, the promised Messiah.' For if they have not, then is our task in vain, and the question at issue falls to the ground.

The prophecies announced, that the expected Messiah should be of the house of David, that he should sit on the throne of Jacob, and restore the kingdom to Israel. Now have these prophecies been accomplished in the person of Jesus?

So well satisfied was Matthew, that a clear and correct descent, in a direct line from David, was essential to establish Jesus' claim to the Messiahship, that he commences his narrative with an elaborate genealogical table from Abraham through David to Joseph, the father of Jesus, and which ends thus: "and Jacob begat Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ." (Matt. i. 16.)

But in the very next passage, and in direct contradiction of the above; we find this genealogy is quietly set aside, with the startling announcement, that Jesus was not the son of Joseph, but of the Lord Jehovah!

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, (that is, *Joseph dreamt that an angel appeared unto him,*) saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost... Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife." (Matt. i. 18—20, 24.)

Now both these accounts cannot be true, and cannot have

been written by the same person, as the one account falsifies the other. It had been foretold, that the Messiah, who was to redeem Israel, should be a descendant, in a direct line, from the house of David, and hence the introduction of this genealogical table. But how then could Jesus be a natural descendant of David, and at the same time be produced by supernatural agency? For if Jesus were begotten by Joseph out of Mary, he could not be begotten by the Holy Ghost; and if he were the legitimate son of Joseph, he could not be the offspring of the Lord Jehovah.

Moreover, we find that Matthew and Luke, although they both exclude Joseph from any participation in the conception of Jesus, yet still great stress is laid upon the Davidical descent of Joseph (see Matt. i. 20. Luke i. 27. ii. 4.), and it appears they do not deny that Mary bore her husband Joseph several other children, as mention is made of the brothers of Jesus. (Matt. xiii. 55.)

To be relieved from this awkward dilemma, some have assumed that the genealogies were those of Mary, and not of Joseph. But then we find it established in Luke's Gospel, that Mary was the cousin of Elizabeth "of the daughters of Aaron" (i. 5.), and therefore was of the Tribe of Levi, whereas David was of the Tribe of Judah! Besides both Matthew and Luke distinctly state their genealogies to be those of Joseph and not of Mary!

It is rather unfortunate, that at the very outset of a work, declared to have been written by the inspiration of God, and on the truth of which our salvation is declared to depend, so monstrous a discrepancy (quite sufficient to shake the credibility of any other work) should, *in limine*, manifest itself!

Matthew with much simplicity acknowledges, that "all

this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets" (Matt. i. 22), in other words, that all this miraculous conception was invented, for the purpose of bringing about the fulfilment of a passage in Isaiah, and making Jesus' birth agree with it.* Grotius, Hammond, and Le Clerc confirm this by acknowledging, that this prophecy was not fulfilled by Jesus in the *literal* sense, but was in reality fulfilled by the birth of the prophet Isaiah's son, in the time of Ahaz, and was afterwards applied to Jesus in a typical or allegorical sense.

The whole of this story is so repugnant to common sense, and so entirely unsupported by any other history, sacred or profane, that many persons, both of the present and former ages, have rejected it altogether as a gross forgery, introduced for the purpose of raising the poor carpenter's son to the rank of a God!

* See this passage of Isaiah explained in Chap. xviii. "on the Prophecies."

CHAPTER II.

GENEALOGY OF JESUS.

BEFORE proceeding further, we will examine the pretensions of this "genealogy of Jesus," as given by Matthew and Luke; for Mark and John take not the least notice of it, or of the miraculous conception, or of the flight into Egypt. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that they omitted these stories because they did not believe them, and did not expect to be believed if they related them.

Here we might expect at least some consistency or some accuracy; but alas, inspiration does not appear to have enlightened the writers much, in making out even a plausible descent of Joseph, the father of Jesus, from David; for the two Gospels cannot even agree with each other on the subject.

The genealogy of Matthew neither agrees with the Old Testament nor with Luke, and the most admired confusion prevails. Matthew states this genealogy to consist of *twenty-eight* generations only, but Luke declares it to consist of *forty-three* generations! In some parts of Luke totally different persons are made the ancestors of Jesus from those in Matthew, and the whole of the pedigree from David to Joseph is totally different in the two Gospels, the accounts offering irreconcilable contradictions to each other! And yet each is announced distinctly, as the genealogy, not of Mary, be it observed, but of Joseph the father of Jesus.

In fact, neither genealogical table has any advantage over the other, for they are equally inaccurate and unhistorical.

"I only wonder (says Rev. Mr. Evanson) that under such circumstances, any rational creature can be found, who could really believe both these contradictory pedigrees to be true, and, what is still more, the inspired work of God."

The sole purpose of these two Gospels is to teach, that Jesus was not the son of Joseph, but, like Bacchus and Hercules among the Romans, the offspring of Mary, impregnated by the supreme deity of heaven. Yet to prove to us, as the completion of the old prophecies required, that he was the lineal descendant of David, they give us this pretended genealogy.—And with such a proof as this the Christian Church has remained satisfied for 1800 years!

"According to the prophecies (says the learned Strauss) the Messiah could only spring from David. When therefore Jesus, a Galilean, whose lineage was utterly unknown, had acquired the reputation of being the Messiah, what was more natural than that tradition should, under different forms, have ascribed to him a Davidical descent; and that genealogical tables, to correspond, should have been formed to support his pretensions. Matthew seems to have adopted the line of kings of the house of David, but Luke's genealogy appears to be altogether a fabrication."

The object of both writers, by entering so minutely into the details of these genealogies, was evidently to prove the fulfilment of the prophecies, that Jesus was lineally sprung from the house of David; thus fulfilling the first and greatest act of his Messiahship. But they both, immediately after, flatly contradict themselves by declaring, that Jesus was begotten of God! that he was not Joseph's son, was not of the house of David, did not fulfil the prophecies,—and therefore could not be the promised Messiah!

CHAPTER III.

MIRACULOUS CONCEPTION.

THE followers of Jesus, who were simple and uneducated men, never had either the opportunity or the means of examining the genealogy of Jesus, but received it submissively as a divine truth. But after the sudden and unexpected execution of Jesus, they found that all attempts to introduce this new religion were met by the Greeks and Romans with taunts and revilings, "for worshipping" (as they said) "a dead man and crucified Jew;" which was, as Paul observed, "to the Jews a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness." They were therefore forced to the alternative, either of giving up the cause altogether, or of following the example of the Greeks and Romans, and elevating Jesus to the rank of a God. This they did not hesitate to do, although causing a discrepancy at variance with their previous narrative.

- It was easy to find in the prophetic writings texts that would answer the purpose; and a passage in Isaiah exactly suited the fancy of this credulous and wonder-loving people. So, immediately after the genealogy it was added, that after Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child, that the husband would have put her away, but he dreamt that an angel appeared and told him that his wife was with child of the Holy Ghost! (Matt. i. 18—20.)

In sober seriousness, would any of the defenders of

Christianity receive, as his wife, a woman in the condition above described, and be satisfied with such an explanation?

However preternaturally Jesus is stated to have been begotten, yet it would appear that his mother had to pass through the natural period of utero-gestation, and at the end of nine months to be duly delivered; and that Jesus came into the world like all other children. This conformity, in result, would lead us to a belief of conformity in the physical causes which produced the son of Mary; for, from natural agents result physical effects, and we are taught to expect a parity in nature between cause and effect.

When the discrepancies are so great, they altogether impeach the historical validity of the narrative; and necessarily lead us to the conclusion that the whole was, in reality, a dream. But these Jews were always dreaming, always seeing visions, they had an angel at their call on all occasions, at the birth of Isaac, of Samson, of John, and, according to the Jewish traditions, of Moses!

Matthew accordingly relates, that "the angel of the Lord appeared unto Joseph *in a dream*, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost" (i. 29). Now we submit that this is a very dubious tale, resting solely on the dream of an obscure artizan. Why did not the angel appear to Joseph in broad daylight, and before credible witnesses? How did Joseph know that it was an angel, for it seems he only dreamt it!

This story of the angel announcing what the Church calls the *immaculate conception*, is not so much as mentioned in the books ascribed to Mark and John; and it is differently related in Matthew and Luke. The former says the angel appeared to Joseph, the latter says it was to Mary; but where is their evidence?—and echo answers *where*?

The Jews have been dreamers from the time of Joseph the son of Jacob, to Joseph the father of Jesus. We hear nothing of angels' visits now-a-days. Man has become so cautious in his belief, and so sceptical in his doubts, that he looks with distrust on everything that is not amenable to his reason, or tangible to his senses; and yet, strange to say, the foundation of the Christian religion rests on a dream, on the dream of an obscure artizan,—“on the baseless fabric of a vision!”

And is it on such testimony, that the most enlightened people in the world have hitherto submitted to receive it, and been satisfied? Would such testimony be listened to, for one moment, in any Court of Justice; or can we suppose that Almighty Wisdom would in this obscure and doubtful manner manifest himself to the world!*

Luke reports some conversations that occurred between Zacharias and an angel, and also between Mary and an angel, when he came to announce “her own conception to herself.” The angel promised Mary, “God shall give unto Jesus the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.” (Luke i. 32, 33.)

Now this promise never has been fulfilled; Jesus never sat on the throne of David, never reigned over the house of

* During the disturbances in Jamaica, when the case of Mr Avery, the missionary, supposed to be implicated, was brought before a Jury, a methodist missionary made his way into court, and said, “he came to bear testimony to the innocence of brother Avery.” “Well, Sir,” said the judge, “what can you testify.” “I have had a vision, sir; two angels appeared unto me in a dream, to bear witness to the innocence of brother Avery.” “Then let them be summoned,” was the rejoinder.—This is the only legitimate way of treating all cases of dreams, and visions, and angelic witnesses,—let them be summoned!

Jacob, nor did he ever restore the kingdom to Israel. On the contrary, the Israelites look on him as an impostor, despise his followers, and denounce his religion; and the country itself is in the hands of the followers of Mahomed!

One great object with the advocates of Jesus' miraculous conception, and of his being begotten by the Holy Ghost, was to prove his impeccability, or being without sin. But the reader will perceive that this object is not even gained; for Jesus was still the offspring of a sinful mother, and therefore subject to all the frailties and penalties of a daughter of Eve.

The history of the conception is entirely omitted not only by Mark, but also by John, the reputed author of the 4th Gospel, and an alleged intimate with the mother of Jesus; and yet the Gospel of John contains not one word of this monstrous and unnatural story.

But (says Strauss) a most important consideration here is, that no retrospective allusion, to the supernatural mode of conception of Jesus, occurs throughout the four Gospels, neither in Matthew, Mark, Luke, nor John. Not only does Mary herself designate Joseph simply as the "father of Jesus" (Luke ii. 48.), but all his contemporaries in general regarded him as the son of Joseph; a fact, not unfrequently alluded to contemptuously and by way of reproach in his presence, and which he never once attempted to contradict. (see Matt. xiii. 55; Luke iv. 22; John vi. 42). His own disciples also, in the fourth Gospel, written a century after the event, still regarded him as the actual son of Joseph. (John i. 45.)

But the proneness of the ancients to represent their great men and benefactors of mankind as the sons of God, was not lost sight of by the early Christians. Examples are recorded, from the Greek and Roman historians, of the divine

origin of many eminent men, especially of Plato and Pythagoras, both founders of new religions, and both believed to be the sons of God by a human mother.

Olshausen and other theologians have urged a strong objection to the miraculous conception, namely, that it engenders unfavourable suspicions of the origin of Jesus; and of this the Jews took advantage by declaring, "that Jesus could not be the Messiah, as he came into the world by unholy means, since, in fact, at the time of her pregnancy, Mary was not married," an opinion destructive of the belief in a Messiah!—The reader will see from this analysis of the birth and genealogy of Jesus, the contradictory and fictitious character it betrays, which puts it quite out of the limits of probability; and whatever Jesus' advocates have gained by elevating him to the rank of a God, they most assuredly have lost by depriving him of the main characteristic of the Messiah.

CHAPTER IV.

BIRTH OF JESUS.

"And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (*And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.*) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judæa, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David :) to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger." (Luke ii. 1—5, 7.)

Now the above contains many and grave errors,—for at the reputed time of Jesus' birth, Judæa was not a Roman province, and could not have been taxed; Cyrenius, at the time, was not governor of Syria, nor till ten years after the death of Herod; and Joseph could not have taken a journey to Bethlehem for any such purpose; and as to the time of Jesus' birth, there is a chronological impossibility.

Matthew states, that Jesus was born at Bethlehem of Judæa, but Luke, by repeatedly calling him "Jesus of Nazareth," assures us he was born at Nazareth in Galilee. He enters into the circumstances which led Joseph to Bethlehem, namely, to be present at the census, which he states was decreed by Augustus Cæsar.

Now in regard to this taxation, it is altogether unauthenticated by history; and not a word is mentioned of it

by Josephus, or any historian of that period. But when Judæa became a Roman province, *twelve years after Jesus was born*, a census was made by Cyrenius (Quirinus). There is therefore here undeniable contradiction between Scripture and history, and a difference of twelve years in the date of Jesus' birth.

This census never required people to leave their homes, as it was invariably taken at their own houses. But Luke wished to introduce here a passage from Micah, by giving birth to the Messiah in the city of David. The writer, however, ought to have made himself better acquainted with history; for to attempt to reconcile the statements of Luke with chronology, is impossible. He wished to place Mary in Bethlehem, and did not hesitate to accommodate both time and circumstances to attain this object.

Now this census did not take place till Jesus was twelve years old; so that the whole details arising from this misstatement, namely, that Jesus 'was born in a manger at Bethlehem, saluted by shepherds, with all the embellishment of angels, and magi, and heavenly hosts, so entirely in accordance, however, with the spirit of the Jewish legends, falls to the ground.—So that we have neither a fixed period for the date of the birth of Jesus, nor a plausible reason for his being born at Bethlehem!

If then (says Strauss) no other reason can be adduced why Jesus should have been born at Bethlehem than that given by Luke, we have absolutely no guarantee that it was the place of his birth; so that both the time and place of Jesus' birth are disputed!

It is also related by Luke, that "the angel of the Lord," and "a multitude of the heavenly host," appeared, at night, to some shepherds watching over their flocks, and directed them to the child in the manger. But it may be reasonably asked,

to what end was this exhibition, and for what purpose did God send down a host of angels to some poor ignorant shepherds (and at night too!) to make known the birth of Jesus? If so, then the deity failed in his object! Why did these angels not appear in broad daylight to the governor and magistrates of the place, who would have been credible and satisfactory witnesses of the truth of this story!

Here it must be remembered that the ancient world generally ascribed the appearance of angels and divine persons to countrymen and shepherds; and the sons of the gods and of great men were frequently represented as being brought up among shepherds; and this has not been lost sight of by the Gospel writers.

The favourite god of the Hindoos, Crishna, was brought up among shepherds. (See Bhagavat.) It was in the fields, by the flocks, that Moses was visited by an angel (Exod. iii.), and it was from the shepherds of Bethlehem that Jehovah took David, the reputed forefather of the Messiah, to rule over Israel.

Matthew's narrative of the birth of Jesus differs widely from that of Luke. In Luke, the birth is announced by an angel, in Matthew by a star; the angel appears to simple shepherds, the star to Eastern Magi. The shepherds are directed to Bethlehem by the angel; the Magi by instructions obtained at Jerusalem. The shepherds do homage by singing hymns of praise, the Magi by costly presents,—such is the harmony of the Gospels!

Matthew states, that when the Magi came to Jerusalem, they inquired for the child, saying, "We have seen his star in the east," and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, "went before them." Now it is curious that this star, after all, did not direct them accurately; for they came to Jerusalem instead of going direct to Bethlehem.

Here the fact is admitted, and sanctioned by divine authority too, that the birth of celebrated men can be ascertained by the stars, and that important revelations in human affairs are indicated by astral phenomena! an opinion now universally exploded, and consigned to the regions of ignorance and superstition. There is little doubt that all the errors and mischiefs produced by a belief in this false science of astrology had their origin and sanction in this legend.

Again, these Magi were heathen Gentiles, who had a different language and religion, and neither believed in Jehovah nor a Messiah. What then was their object in undertaking this long journey? for after offering presents to the child, they disappear, and we hear no more of them! Only fancy these idolaters taking a journey of many hundred miles to find out a child, that the stars *falsely* told them would be King of the Jews, and for the purpose of worshipping him!

The reader will at once perceive this legend was introduced for the mere purpose of the glorification of the infant Jesus. But that such an exhibition ever took place, is not merely improbable, but bears the marks of fiction in every line.

CHAPTER V.

MURDER OF THE INNOCENTS.

THE story of Herod destroying all the children under two years old, belongs altogether to the Gospel of Matthew; not one of the rest mention anything about it. Had such a circumstance been true, the universality of it must have made it known to all the writers of the times, and would have been too striking to have been omitted by any.

Luke relates that all proceeded *happily* with the infant Jesus; the shepherds returned with gladness in their hearts; the child grew apace in peace and tranquillity, and was presented in due time at the temple. But Matthew, on the contrary, makes all the child's affairs to take a tragical turn; Herod issues a murderous decree against all the young children of Bethlehem and neighbourhood; and Jesus, with his parents, is forced to flee into Egypt, and does not return till after Herod's death.—This is another instance of the discrepancies and want of harmony of these Gospels! As to Mark and John, they seem never to have heard anything about these strange events, or if they did, treated them with prudent silence.

But this is not the worst feature in this statement; for Jesus, who, as the Messiah, was expected to bring peace and good-will upon earth, is here represented as the cause of an awful effusion of innocent blood; which might have been easily avoided, had the heavenly star done its duty, and directed the wise men correctly.

Herod is now represented to have sent for the chief-priests and scribes, and inquired of them the birth-place of the expected Messiah; and they are stated as giving an interpretation of a passage in Micah, that the Messiah should be born "in Bethlehem." He accordingly sends the wise men to ascertain where the child was to be found! But they, "being warned of God in a dream," did not return to him again.

It would appear from this episode, that the heathen Magi had their dreams and warnings from God, as well as the chosen people. Now had God warned them, in the first instance, not to go to Jerusalem at all, but to proceed to Bethlehem direct, this dreadful massacre of the children would have been avoided altogether. For "Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceedingly wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof." (Matt. ii. 16.)

Here the conduct attributed to Herod is, in itself, most absurd; he makes no search after the one dangerous child, but slays all the children of a whole town and adjoining country, indiscriminately. It is quite inconceivable, that any fit of fear or zeal could lead a politic old king like Herod to indulge in such useless and costly cruelty; or that the people would quietly have submitted to it.

Now Josephus, who has filled thirty-seven chapters with the history of Herod, and entered minutely into the details of his barbarities, omits all allusion to such wholesale slaughter. Lardner supposes that Josephus wilfully suppressed this; but we find that Matthew, Luke, and John, and all the historians of those times, have suppressed it also, and are altogether silent on the subject. *Mark*

It is a curious coincidence, that in the sacred writings of the Hindoos there is a similar story related of the tyrant

Kanza, at the birth of the Hindoo god Crishna; the extraordinary similarity of whose life and acts to that of Jesus, Sir William Jones bears testimony, and which he declares it is impossible to deny.—He thus writes :

“That the name of Crishna and the general features of his history were long anterior to the birth of our Saviour, and probably to the time of Homer, we know very certainly. The celebrated poem *Bhagavat*, which contains an account of his life, is filled with a narrative of a most extraordinary kind. The incarnate deity was cradled among herdsmen or shepherds; a tyrant, at the time of his birth, ordered all new-born males to be slain; yet this new-born babe was preserved in a wonderful manner. He performed amazing miracles in his infancy, and at the age of seven years held up a mountain on the tip of his finger; he saved multitudes by his miraculous powers; he raised the dead, and was the meekest and mildest of created beings; he washed the feet of the Brahmins, and preached very nobly and sublimely; he was pure and chaste in reality, and benevolent and tender.” (*Sir W. Jones' Works*.)

Luke never mentions one word of this horrid massacre, nor Mark, nor John, so that it rests on the testimony of Matthew alone. Now this absurd and revolting act must be well authenticated, before any credit can be attached to it, and therefore we should expect to see it noticed by some of the historians of the times. But neither Josephus nor Philo, who lived at the time, nor the Rabbins, who were assiduous to blacken Herod's character, give us the slightest hint of such a monstrous decree.

This story will not stand the test of criticism, as it places the Almighty, in regard of his Omniscience, in a very anomalous position, for if God specially interposed to blind the mind of Herod and suggest to the Magi that they should not

return to Jerusalem to give notice to him, why did he not inspire them to proceed, in the first instance, direct to Bethlehem? whereby Herod would have been in ignorance of the child's existence, and this cruel and unnecessary massacre have been altogether avoided. But the truth is, the writer of this legend wished to introduce the infant Jesus at his birth, like other heroes of the times, with extraordinary proofs of his value and power; and that he could not come into the world in the usual way, without creating a mighty sensation, alarming even kings on their thrones!

The first act recorded of Moses was the murder of an Egyptian; the first act of Hercules was the strangling of a serpent in his cradle; the first act of Samson was the slaying of a lion.—Now it was considered necessary, that the birth of Jesus should be accompanied by some event equally astounding; and what suited the blood-thirsty character of the Jews more than the indiscriminate slaughter of some hundred innocent and helpless children!

To represent a murderous decree (says Strauss) as having been directed by Herod against Jesus, was the interest of the primitive Christian legend. In all ages, Legend has glorified the infancy of great men by persecutions and attempts on their life. The greater the danger, the higher was their value; the more unexpectedly their deliverance was wrought, the more evident is the esteem in which they are supposed to be held by Heaven. We find this in the childhood of Cyrus, of Romulus, and even later of Augustus.—Why not then of Jesus, whose destiny was so much higher?

Matthew relates, that after the departure of the wise men, Joseph is admonished by an angel "in a dream," to flee with the child into Egypt. "When he arose he took the young child and his mother by night, and fled into Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod." But neither Mark,

Luke, nor John take any notice of these flights and dreams. On the contrary, Luke tells us, that Joseph remained at Bethlehem, until after the child was circumcised, and his mother purified; after which, instead of fleeing into Egypt, he states, that they went up to Jerusalem, to present the child Jesus at the Altar,—the most public place in the kingdom, almost into Herod's presence!—So much for Gospel harmony.

When Jesus and his parents are in Egypt (according to Matthew) an angel again appears to Joseph "in a dream," and instructs him to return to the Land of Israel; but when he arrived there, he was again warned by God "in a dream," and directed to turn aside to Nazareth; "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene." (Matt. ii. 23.)—Now there is no such prophecy in existence!

Here, in the compass of a single chapter, we have five extraordinary interpositions of God; one anomalous star and four angelic visions! Now for the star and first vision, a single miracle might, with great advantage, have been substituted, as either the star or the vision *singly* might have prevented the wise men from going to Jerusalem, and thus have averted the dreadful massacre said to have been perpetrated by Herod!—The last two visions, directing Joseph to proceed to Nazareth, might, for consistency sake, have been included in one, as they make God appear to have no forethought, and to be ignorant of the course of human events.

But the object of this legend was to preserve the resemblance in Jesus to his great prototypes Abraham and Moses. Abraham was forced to make a journey to Egypt and return again to the land of Israel; and Moses was in Egypt and left it to convey the chosen people to the Land of Israel,—thus establishing Jesus' identity with "the redeemers of Israel."

The whole account of the birth of Jesus is such (says Mr Hennell), that if found by itself, it would be considered as a wild Eastern tale, or an imitation of some similar fables relating to the births of preceding heroes, philosophers, and divinities. (See Origin of Christianity.)

From this time, for twelve years, we hear nothing farther of Jesus, and the Gospels are altogether silent regarding him *till his twelfth year*, when he is again introduced to our notice ; to record, in a scene that is related to have occurred in the temple, the precocity of his genius, and his anxiety to begin the great work of reformation. He then disappears, and is not again heard of for eighteen years !

CHAPTER VI.

JESUS' VISIT TO THE TEMPLE.

Now the parents of Jesus "went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast." (Luke ii. 41, 42.)

It would appear that the parents of Jesus had carefully brought him up in the Jewish religion, caused him to fulfil all its rites and ceremonies, and at his twelfth year brought him to Jerusalem to be present at the Feast of the Passover. They had accomplished a day's journey on their return home, when they found that their son Jesus was missing; and on going back to Jerusalem in search of him, "it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions." (Luke ii. 46.)

Now this careless and negligent conduct in the parents of Jesus, well knowing his high destination, from the announcement of angels, and visions, and dreams, is most unaccountable and most unlikely!—Again, when we consider the careful manner in which Jewish children were educated, and taught to honour and obey their parents, we are equally surprised at this undutiful conduct of Jesus, in leaving his parents in this surreptitious manner, regardless of their anguish and anxiety, "for they were seeking him three days sorrowing." His conduct seems unnatural and undutiful, being a positive breach of the third commandment, and shows anything but a sinless development of his nature!

Jesus is described as "sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions." Now it appears from the Jewish records, that no youth or pupil was permitted to sit in the presence of the Rabbins or doctors, much less to put questions to them ; and if Jesus did either, he must indeed have excited the surprise and astonishment of all !

The mother of Jesus naturally reproved her son for all the anxiety and affliction he had caused them by his undutiful conduct ; when he retorted on her by asking, " Why she sought him ; did she not know that he was about his Father's business ; and that he was to be sought nowhere else than in his Father's house ?"—Now how can we be expected to give credit to this story ? That the boy Jesus, in his twelfth year, should talk in this manner to his parents, and declare the necessity of attending to his Father's work ; and yet, that we should hear no more of the prosecution of this work for the next twenty years of his life ! This account is highly inconsistent and improbable.

Again, the parents of Jesus are said " not to have understood his words." But if we are to believe the previous announcement of the angels both to Mary and Joseph, and the other visions and prophecies declared in behalf of their son Jesus ; and, moreover, when it is stated, that " Mary kept all these things and pondered *them* in her heart," (Luke ii. 19.)—she assuredly ought not to have been in doubt for one moment as to the meaning of his words. And yet the narrative declares that the parents of Jesus " understood not the saying which he spake unto them !" (Luke ii. 50.)

Now if this be a true statement, then we must conclude that the previous announcement of Jesus' future destiny

could not have taken place,—and either one or other account must be a fabrication!

But even at the presentation in the Temple, we are told that the parents of Jesus “marvelled” at the discourse of Simeon regarding Jesus,—which means, that they did not understand it! We must therefore come to the conclusion and repeat, that if the parents of Jesus did not understand these sayings, then those earlier communications could not possibly have happened.

It is the character, not of an historical record (says Dr Strauss), but of a marvellous legend, to represent its characters as so permanently in a state of wonder, that they not only, at the first appearance of any extraordinary event, express their astonishment, but even at the tenth repetition of it, when it might be expected that they would have become familiar with it; obviously with the view of exacting more highly the divine impartition by this continuous incomprehensibility!

In the latter period of Jesus' life, it will be seen that the account of his sufferings and death is set forth by the circumstance, that the repeated disclosures of Jesus on the subject remain throughout quite incomprehensible to his disciples, although repeatedly and explicitly announced to them in clear and definite terms. As here also, the mystery of the Messiahship of Jesus is tried to be exalted, by exhibiting his parents, at every fresh announcement, declaring their utter ignorance and amazement.—But all these are beacons, pointing out the mythical and legendary character of this narrative.

CHAPTER VII.

JESUS' INTERREGNUM.

From this period, till the time when Jesus is said to have entered on his assumed mission, *a period of eighteen years*, these gospel narratives are altogether silent regarding him. Now the question naturally arises, What could Jesus have been doing all this time? That he was not occupied "about his Father's business" is clear, otherwise we should have had some account of it.

But here the apocryphal gospels, which have been handed down to us, come to our aid, and throw some light on this obscure subject. We are told that Jesus followed the same occupation as his father Joseph; and that he was enabled, by his miraculous powers, greatly to advance his father's reputation as a carpenter! This is farther confirmed by the question in Mark vi. 3,—“Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon?”

Here the question naturally suggests itself,—if the reputed Son of God and promised Messiah, at his twelfth year exhibited such precocity of wisdom and ardour of spirit, and boasted of the necessity of “being about his Father's business,” and actually eloped from his parents in his eagerness to begin the great work of redemption, is there not here an evident contradiction, that his followers are unable to show a single act that he performed for the next eighteen years of his life, in furtherance of this great

object? Surely he might have been more profitably occupied, up to his thirtieth year, had he really been the Messiah, than in assisting his father Joseph in the daily employment of a mechanical occupation.

If he really came on earth to work out the salvation of mankind, why were so many years of valuable time suffered to elapse, without any attempt to carry out the great object of his mission, "to which end (as he himself is made to declare) he was born, and for which cause he came into the world?" (John xviii. 37.) Was this following out assiduously his Father's business, in thus spending eighteen years of his life in so unprofitable a manner, allowing the chosen people of God to continue so much longer in a state of reprobation without applying the remedy?—If he were the Son of God or the promised Messiah, these are mysteries beyond our humble comprehension!

CHAPTER VIII.

BAPTISM OF JESUS.

AFTER this long silent interval of eighteen years, Jesus at length, in his thirtieth year, again makes his appearance at the waters of Jordan, to receive baptism of John.

So utterly unknown was Jesus hitherto, and so ignorant were the Jewish people, that they had possessed *for thirty years*, within themselves, in a poor carpenter's son, the promised Messiah, although expecting and anxiously looking out for his coming, that many of Jesus' followers, unable to get over this difficulty, would not allow that, before this time, he had any existence on earth. And this may account for the discrepancy in Mark and John's Gospels beginning the narrative of his life from this time, his thirtieth year. "And it was publicly taught (says the Rev. Mr. Taylor) that Jesus, instead of having passed through the impatience of infancy, boyhood, and adolescence, had descended on the banks of the Jordan, in the form of perfect manhood." (Taylor's Syntagma.)

Baptism for the first time is here introduced, but it was long known among the Jews; and the purification by water is frequently spoken of by their prophets, as the means which Jehovah would employ to cleanse the people from their sins. Even at the present day, ablution in the sacred water of the Ganges is believed by the Hindoos to possess spiritual efficacy in purifying the soul; and to die on the banks of the Ganges is supposed to give the sufferer a legi-

timate passport to the other world, as baptism is with Christians.*

It appears that John, in imitation of Elijah, had been going about, dressed in clothes of camel's hair, &c., and exhorting the people to "repent, for the kingdom of heaven was at hand." He confessed them, and administered the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.† Jesus, attracted by John's celebrity, also became a candidate for his baptism, and by his submission to it, virtually declared himself one of his disciples; and thereby tacitly acknowledged his own sinful nature. "Thus it becometh us (he said) to fulfil all righteousness." (Matt. iii. 15.)

Now with what propriety could Jesus, "*who knew no sin*," receive baptism of John for the remission of his sins, or the destined Messiah attend to the preaching of his own precursor, to be prepared by him for the coming of *himself*? And again, if the remission of sins was granted on condition of repentance and confession of their sins, what becomes of the doctrine of the atonement; or that the supposed sacrifice of Jesus' death could be required by the Deity to the pardoning the sins of mankind?

* Hurdwar is a place of prodigious resort once a year for the Brahmins, who sell the blessings of superstition to the myriads of Hindoo sinners, who collect on the banks of the Ganges for purification, and to be absolved, by ablution, from their sins. To see the crowds of people of all ranks there assembled, recalls forcibly to the mind the Scripture account of John on the banks of the Jordan; met for the self-same purpose, namely, the purification by water for the remission of sins.—The Indian rite, however, according to history, is the more ancient of the two.

† Here John establishes that monstrous doctrine of "confession for the remission of sins," of which the Roman Catholics have made so profitable a use.

"Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him." (Matt. iii. 16.)

Matthew and Mark relate that the Spirit was *like a dove*; Luke says that it descended, *in a bodily shape*, like a dove, and John adds, that this descent of the dove *was foretold* by John the Baptist; and by the time of Justin Martyr there was the addition of *a fire kindled in the river*, to glorify the scene!—In this way, a simple tale acquires additions, and is at length magnified into the marvellous.

John hearing afterwards, when in prison, of the acts of Jesus, is reported (Matt. xi. 3) to have sent to him to inquire, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" Now after the above wonderful miracle manifested at Jesus' baptism, and God's open declaration *before* John, for the Baptist to send such a message to Jesus, throws a grave suspicion and doubt on the truthfulness of this legendary tale.

But what are we to say of John's own declaration, in the 4th Gospel, regarding Jesus:—

"The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God." (John i. 29—34.)

Now after this open and public testimony of John at the baptism of Jesus, that he was the Messiah and Son of God, to exhibit such gross ignorance, by sending to inquire if he were the Messiah, or if they were to look for another, clearly exposes the fictitious character of this tale; and leads us to suppose that these Gospels were made up of traditionary fragments and stories, so carelessly put together as to exhibit in every page the most awkward contradictions.

It is such rude and careless manufacture as this, meeting us at every step, that shakes our belief in the truthfulness of this narrative, and induces us to agree with the author of *Theology Displayed*, "that, in the whole life of Jesus, there is but a thread of truth in a web of fiction."—This thread of truth we shall presently unravel, we hope, to our readers' satisfaction.

"At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus, and said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do show forth themselves in him." (*Matt. xiv. 1, 2.*)

It appears from history, that Herod the tetrarch, fearful of some commotion from the crowds which John had collected together, had him seized and put into prison, and ultimately to death. Here Matthew puts into Herod's mouth a speech very consistent with the ideas of a Christian, but entirely out of character as regards a heathen. It is evidently inserted here for the glorification of Jesus at the expense of truth.

Moreover the account of John's death and its cause, as related in the succeeding verses (*Matt. xiv.*), is not confirmed by history. Josephus the historian, who, from his

rank and intimate acquaintance with the politics and leading men of Judæa at that time, must have had better means of knowing the truth, and is assuredly more worthy of credit than the anonymous writer of the first Gospel, distinctly states "that Herod Antipas put John to death *deliberately* for political motives." (Jos. Jewish War.)

CHAPTER IX.

THE TEMPTATION SCENE.

“Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple. And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.” (Matt. iv. 1—8, 5, 6, 8, 9.)

THE Gospel writers state, that after Jesus' baptism he was taken up into the wilderness, where after fasting forty days, till he was an hungred! God submitted him to the ordeal of temptation.

Now if Jesus was of divine origin, and possessed of “a sinless nature,” what possible use or object could there be in submitting him to this test? The simple fact of its being applied to him, only shows the opinion the Deity had of him, namely, that he was as liable to err as any of those to whom it is said he had previously applied this test. But his great prototypes, Adam and Abraham, were submitted to this ordeal,—why then should not Jesus also pass through it? This would have been a vain and foolish exhibition of the

Deity's power, had he believed Jesus to be pure and sinless, and who could not err; and equally so, if he had made this trial for the vain-glorious purpose "of manifesting his glory,"—as there was no one present to witness or record it.

The devil is here represented as performing the most wonderful miracles: He transports Jesus into the city of Jerusalem, and places him on a pinnacle of the temple; he carries him to the top of "an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them," and offers them all, if he will fall down and worship him.

That which is the veritable stumbling-block in the life of Jesus (says Strauss) is the personal *appearance* of the devil, with his temptations. The three temptations are operated on in three different places and far apart. It is asked how Jesus passed from one place to another in such company? Luke tells us that the devil shewed Jesus "all the kingdoms of the world in a moment," and carried him to the pinnacle of the temple. This trait indicates something magical. Where is the mountain from which one may view all the kingdoms of the earth? It places both Jesus and the devil in rather an unpleasant category, that they were so ignorant of the geography of the earth, as to suppose that the world could be viewed from the top of a high mountain!

Now we would ask, Who is this being called "the devil," whence did he derive all this power of working miracles, and why was he permitted to thwart the Almighty and molest mankind? We ask these questions in sober seriousness, to point out to our readers the utter impossibility of any such creation, if the Deity is, in reality, omnipotent or all-powerful.

The truth is, that the Jews knew nothing of such a creation as the devil till their captivity, when this personage was

first introduced by the Persians to their notice, "as the god who presided over the evil actions of man." The Jews had previously believed their God Jehovah to possess the two principles of good and evil within himself, but they readily adopted these higher views of the godhead.

The Christian priests have, unfortunately for mankind, adhered to this absurd idea; and even in this enlightened age continue to teach the anomaly,—that the Almighty created a spiritual and angelic being, whom he endowed with power sufficient to thwart him in his benevolent intentions towards man.

"The story of Christ's temptation (says Burder) is one of the most anomalous in the New Testament. For it speaks of a personage, equal in power to God, whom it represents under the name of the devil. People cannot but abhor an hypothesis, which admits of an eternal uncreated being, distinct from God, an enemy to God, and essentially wicked. The devil is believed to be a man, with the legs and horns of a beast; but men of sense and reflection consider this being as nothing more than the evil dispositions of human nature personified."

CHAPTER X.

JESUS THE MESSIAH.

THE idea of a Messiah grew up and was nourished among the Jews in a soil half religious and half political. It was nurtured by national adversity; and in the time of Jesus was embodied in the expectation, derived from their prophets, that the Messiah would ascend the throne of David, free the people from a foreign yoke, and found a kingdom that would last for ever. But, that he was to be the *Saviour* of his people in any other sense than from the Roman yoke, is directly contradicted by the Prophet Isaiah, who expressly declares, that BESIDE THE LORD THY GOD THERE IS NO SAVIOUR. (See Isaiah xliii. 3, 10, 11, also the Introduction to this work.)

It was only in the latter part of his career that Jesus was led away by these ambitious views, and believed himself to be the promised Messiah. We find the watchword on his first appearance and his instructions to the disciples differed not from those of John, who professed himself only as the forerunner of the Messiah, namely, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." It indicates in neither an assumption of the character of the Messiah, but merely that of a teacher who points out the way.

Jesus, no doubt, at the more advanced period of his career, did indulge in these delusive hopes; and his followers entertained but one idea—the immediate restoration of the kingdom to Israel. They even disputed among themselves

which would be greatest in the kingdom of their master, and petitioned for seats on his right hand and on his left; and in reply to Peter, "We have left all and followed thee, what shall we have therefore?" Jesus tells them, "When the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Matt. xix. 28.)

There is no doubt then, that Jesus and his followers latterly believed in the literal import of his promise; and the disciples must have understood it literally, when, even after his crucifixion, they still harboured anticipations of worldly greatness.

Among the reputed actions of Jesus, his last entry into Jerusalem (Matt. xxi.) is given as a proof of his temporal views of sitting on the throne of David. They appear in the time which he chose, *the Passover*; the animal on which he rode, by which he fulfilled the prophecy of Zacharias; the violent procedure he is stated to have hazarded in the Temple; his severe philippic denounced on the higher classes, and parting threat, that they should not see him again, except as the Messiah (Matt. xxiii.); and the application to himself of the terms "Son of Man," &c., which were specially referable, by the Jews, to the promised Messiah.

The terms—"Son of Man," "Son of God," "the Lord," "the Christ or anointed," employed in the Gospels, are all convertible terms, and were applied to Jesus in reference to his supposed Messiahship; but had no reference to his reputed divine origin; and what was originally employed in a figurative sense afterwards came to be interpreted in the literal signification. For it was of daily occurrence among the early Christians to attach a literal signification to that which originally bore a figurative meaning.

The Gospels tell us, that during his life, Jesus adhered

most strictly to the Jewish Laws. He attended the synagogue on the sabbath, journeyed to Jerusalem at the time of the Feasts, and eat of the Paschal lamb with his disciples. He even threatened with the lowest rank in the kingdom of heaven those who infringed on the Laws of Moses in the smallest degree; and in accordance with this command, the apostles adhered to the Mosaic law strictly, long after his crucifixion. It is even related that the first fifteen bishops of Jerusalem adhered so closely to the Mosaic law, as to undergo the rite of circumcision.

There is little doubt, that Jesus never contemplated extending his mission beyond the children of Israel; the chosen people of God, "the Elect," as he termed them; and firmly believed that its object was limited exclusively to them. The prophecies naturally led him to this belief, and that the sole object of a Messiah was the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. He therefore laid down to his disciples a rule of national exclusiveness; and when he sent them out on their mission, he commanded them, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, . . . go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matt. x. 5, 6.)

That these were the views of Jesus may be seen from the many deliberations and contentions among the apostles, after his death, as to the propriety of admitting the Gentiles to a participation in the kingdom of Jesus.

Although Jesus firmly expected *latterly* to restore the throne of David, yet he rested his hopes less on human assistance than on the legion of Angels, which he believed his heavenly Father would send him. (Matt. xxvi.) He is represented as a peaceable, quiet, timid man, averse to acts of violence, but zealous for the success of his mission. When he found he could not realize his object by his own will, he patiently waited for the expected signal from his

heavenly Father, who, he felt sure, would, at the appointed time, come forward to his assistance.

This faith and assurance of ultimate aid did not desert him till the last moment, when he was nailed to the cross, and became weak and faint and exhausted ; when he made that memorable *renunciation of his claim*, reproaching God for so cruelly deserting him in the memorable words : “ My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ? ” — thus virtually renouncing his claims to the Messiahship.

CHAPTER XI.

RETROSPECT.

WE have now shewn that, even allowing the Jews the full benefit of a knowledge of the true God (which we believe they never possessed), yet that the Messiah had not been perfected in the person of Jesus, nor were the prophecies fulfilled in any one essential in him;—He was not of the house of David; he did not restore the kingdom to Israel; nor did he ever sit on the throne of David.

We shall however now enter on an analysis of the religious views attributed to him, irrespective of his claims as the Messiah. These are comprised in the exhortations and sayings, discourses and parables, which it is stated, in the Gospel narratives, that he delivered at sundry times and places to his followers.

Before however we enter on this examination, we wish briefly to draw the attention of the reader to the state of the Jewish nation at this period, to enable him clearly to comprehend the meaning of many of the sayings attributed to Jesus, and the source whence they were evidently derived.

The Jews were at this time (2000 years ago) in a state of national servitude, and their country was in the hands of the Romans. Their God, Jehovah, after all his promises, and the "perpetual covenant" he had sworn in their favour, seemed to have quite deserted them, and they were in despair. Their spirit was only upheld by the repeated promises of their prophets, that as soon as they had repented, Jehovah

would send them an anointed prince, who would relieve them from the Roman yoke, and restore the kingdom to Israel. This state of things was called the Kingdom of Heaven, and the anointed prince the Messiah.

This seems to have become an absorbing topic among the people, and the prophecy of the 70 weeks of Daniel (ix. 24) led the Jews to look out most earnestly for the advent of the Messiah, and during the Roman encroachments it revived in full force. Josephus states (Wars vi. 6): "What did most to elevate their minds, was an ambiguous oracle, found in their sacred writings, how that, about this time, one of their country should become governor of the habitable world."

Fanatics were daily running about the streets of Jerusalem, calling on the people to lose no time in preparing for this crisis, and urging them to "repent, for the kingdom of heaven was at hand." Worldly goods and worldly vanities were declared to be of no value in comparison of this New Jerusalem, where Jehovah, in the person of his Messiah, would come to reign over them. Among others appeared John, and a Galilean named Jesus; and it required all the activity of the government to keep the people quiet, and prevent them running after the various fanatics and pretenders to the Messiahship.

The Jews were, at this time, divided into three great sects, the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenians; which last sect had specially distinguished themselves by their austerity, moral purity, and primitive sanctity of manners; all their lives being occupied in prayer and reading the Scriptures, and in educating and instructing the people,—"They rejected pleasure as evil, and looked on temperance and a conquest over their passions as the greatest of virtues." (Joseph. Wars.)

CHAPTER XII.

DOCTRINES OF THE ESSENIANS.

To this sect we wish specially to draw the attention of the reader, from the extraordinary similarity of its doctrines to those said to have been delivered by Jesus; and evidently directing us to the source whence these Gospel narratives sprung. Josephus and Philo, contemporaneous Jewish historians, thus describe them:—

“The third sect of Jews is the Essenes, or Essenians; they cherish mutual love beyond other men; they reject all pleasures as sinful, and look on temperance, and a conquest over their passions, as the greatest virtue. There prevails among them a contempt of matrimony, but they receive the children of others, and educate them as their own, while yet tender and susceptible of instruction.

“They despise riches, and are so liberal as to excite our admiration. Nor can any be found among them who is more wealthy than the rest. Every one gives what he hath to him that wanteth.

“As for their piety towards God, it is very extraordinary. Before sunrise they speak not a word till they have offered up their prayers, and purified themselves with water.

“Their food is of the plainest kind; and both before and after meals they return thanks to God, as the bestower of all good; the cause of which is that perpetual sobriety they exercise, and the same settled measure of meat and drink that is allotted to them, and sufficient for them.

"Two rules they observe,—to assist those who want it, and to shew mercy. They carefully curb their anger and restrain their passions. They are eminent for fidelity, and are the ministers of peace. They avoid all swearing, which they look on as worse than perjury, and consider their word the same as an oath. They study what is good for body and soul, and those herbs that may cure distempers.

"If any one wishes to join their sect, he must undergo a year's probation, and when he has proved himself, is made a partaker of the waters of purification (baptism). He is required to take a solemn pledge to exercise piety towards God, justice towards man, harm no one, avoid the wicked, assist the righteous, and be faithful to all men; be a lover of truth, and a hater of lies, keep his hands clear of theft, and his soul of unlawful gains, and ascribe all things to God.

"They are long-lived, from the simplicity of their diet, and by means of the regular course of life they observe. They condemn the miseries of life, and despise all pain and suffering; and as for death, if for the glory of God, they prefer it to living. They smile at pain, and laugh to scorn the infliction of torment on them.

"They believe that their bodies are corruptible, but their souls immortal, and that the good are rewarded and the wicked punished after death. These are the divine doctrines of the Essenians about the soul.

"There are also those among them who foretell things to come; and it is but seldom they fail in their predictions. It also deserves our admiration, how much they excel all other men in virtue and righteousness, to such a degree as hath never appeared among other men, but hath endured a long while among them.

"There are about four thousand men who live in this

way, and neither marry nor keep servants, thinking the latter tempts men to be unjust, and the former gives a handle to domestic quarrels." (Antiq. xviii. c. 1.)

Philo, in his work on *Contemplative Life*, thus speaks of the Essenians as an old-established sect:—

"Palestine and Syria are not unproductive of good and honourable men. There are above 4000 people called Essenians, which means *holy*, who have attained the highest holiness in the worship of God, and that not by sacrificing animals, but by purity of heart.

"As to learning, they leave logic to fierce disputants about words, contenting themselves with the acquisition of virtue and the knowledge of God and the creation. Other parts of knowledge they leave to vain and subtle metaphysicians; but moral philosophy they eagerly cultivate.

"The laws they study at all times, especially on the Sabbath; and, regarding it as holy, they abstain from all work, and, assembling in the synagogues, read and expound the Scriptures. Their subjects of instruction are piety, holiness, and righteousness; and the knowledge of good and evil.

"The rules which guide them, are the love of God, the love of virtue, and the love of man. Of their love to God, they prove by leading a life of continual purity, regarding Him as the author of all good, and cause of no evil. This they evince by their freedom from avarice, ambition, and sensual pleasures; by their temperance, patience, frugality, humility, and contentment, and exercise of every virtue.

"They all live in common, and their doors are never shut to the stranger or the afflicted. The sick are carefully attended, and the aged are loved and revered. Such are these champions of Virtue."

Philo thus describes the Essenians who embraced the

contemplative life, called Therapeutæ, or healers, as they professed to cure men's minds of vices, and bodies of disorders :—

“ They are seized with an enthusiastic love of heaven ; consider themselves dead to the world, and only desire a blessed immortality. They separate themselves from society to avoid the evil intercourse of the world.

“ In each house is a sanctuary or monastery, where they bring the laws, and prophets, and psalms to perfect their piety. The idea of God and the beauty of his attributes are ever present to their minds ; and many deliver magnificent visions suggested by their sacred philosophy.

“ They spend the whole interval from morning till evening in religious exercises, reading the holy scriptures, and unfolding their meaning. Their food is coarse bread seasoned with salt, and their drink water. Their chief object is the practice of humility ; being convinced that as falsehood is the root of pride, so freedom from pride is the offspring of truth.

“ From their peculiar principles and sentiments, they have many persecutors, yet have they never been able to substantiate any accusation against this band of holy men. On the other hand, men, captivated by their integrity and honour, unite with them in admiring their communion and liberality as the earnest pledge of a perfect and happy life.” (Jos. Wars.)

Philo was an elderly man, and of established reputation for learning, at the time when he was sent at the head of the embassy from the Alexandrian Jews to Caligula (A. D. 39), and his book was most likely written before that time. It is therefore not impossible that he was describing the followers of Jesus, under the title of Essenians. His description certainly cannot be limited to them, for he speaks

of the Essenians as an old-established sect. Josephus says distinctly, that the sect existed above two centuries before Christ. Pliny speaks of the Essenians as of a sect which renewed its numbers without marriage, by the reception of converts; "and thus for several thousand years this people is perpetually propagated, without any being born among them." (Lib. 5. c. 17.)

Now it appears that this extraordinary sect of the Jews was in existence, residing in Judæa, long before the time of Jesus, and its members had spread themselves and their doctrines over Palestine, Syria, and Egypt, and exercised all these, as Josephus calls them, "divine doctrines." The reader cannot but observe the striking similarity between them and the precepts, sayings, and doings, attributed to Jesus, and handed down to us by the Gospel writers. They had set the example of societies living in voluntary union, having all their property in common, and acting, in a remarkable degree, on the principles of universal benevolence and moral purity.

Josephus not only mentions the superior skill of this sect in the interpretation of the prophets, but allows them pre-eminence in the gift of prophecy itself, and adds, "We have thought proper to relate these facts, how strange soever they be, because many of these Essenians have, by their excellent virtues, been thought worthy of this knowledge of Divine revelations." (Wars, i. 3, 5.) This quite agrees with the stress laid upon the fulfilment of prophecy and pretensions to prophecy in the New Testament. And yet, strange to say, this sect is not once mentioned in the Gospels, nor is their name once introduced in the New Testament.

Eusebius, Bishop of Cæsarea, in his Ecclesiastical History, written in the third century, thus speaks of the Essenians; "These things are reported by a man (Philo) who listened to the holy Scriptures, as they. (Essenians) ex-

pounded them ; and in short, it is very likely, that those Scriptures of the ancients, of which he speaks, *were the Gospels and writings of the apostles* ; and that certain digests of the ancient prophets interpreted,—such as is contained in the Epistles to the Hebrews and many others, *these were the Epistles*. But that Philo (in speaking of the Essenians) wrote these things with reference to those who were the first preachers of the *discipline*, which is according to the Gospels, and to the manners first handed down from the apostles, must be manifest to every man."

It is impossible to read the account of these people, coupled with the above facts, without being impressed with the conviction that their acts and doctrines are the veritable acts and doctrines described in the Gospels, and attributed to this person Jesus ; and that the Gospels must have emanated from this sect, giving a detailed account of their proceedings, and wanderings, and efforts to propagate their doctrines.

The disciples mentioned in the Gospels, there is good ground to believe, were of this sect of Essenians, for the following reasons :—*first*, they were neither Pharisees nor Sadducees,—*secondly*, they were chiefly of the lower orders,—*thirdly*, the society formed by them, as described in the Acts, resembles closely the societies of the Essenians, as described by Josephus,—and *lastly*, the name of Essenians never occurs once in the New Testament, whilst the Sadducees and Pharisees are frequently alluded to, and as frequently abused. This is singular, except on the supposition that the disciples were Essenians themselves ; and tends to the belief that they were the originators and propagators of the new religion, under the name of Ebionites and Nazarenes, and the writers of the Gospels, in which they had introduced all their own religious views, and teachings, and movements, and acts.

Now to carry out the idea of a Messiah, which was so essential to their success in the propagation of their doctrines among the people, who were at that time in daily expectation of his coming, and anxiously looking out for him, they chose, from among the numerous aspirants to the office, one Jesus, most likely of their own sect, who (as related by Josephus) went about Jerusalem "endued with a divine furor," denouncing the state of the people, and calling on them to repent, with the constant cry of "Woe, woe to Jerusalem." (Jos. 6. v. 3. vi.)

Christianity is therefore only another name for Judaism, with the addition of the above distinguishing doctrines of "these good and holy men," the Essenian Jews, whom Philo has held up "as exceeding all others in virtue, wisdom, and piety, and to be revered and imitated on that account."

It is impossible not to be surprised and delighted with the character of the people here delineated; nor can any unprejudiced reader, who reflects that they flourished in Judæa many years before the introduction of Christianity, help considering them as the originators and promulgators of these new doctrines, under the name of Nazarenes or Ebionites, which name was given them as a term of reproach for their poverty. For that the Essenians were the same, under a different name, with Ebionites or Nazarenes, Eusebius has not only asserted as a fact, but has taken some pains to prove; and his opinion has been confirmed by the united testimony of St Jerome and Epiphanius, who lived in the third century. (*See Jones' Ecclesiastical Researches.*)

The virtues which the Essenians practised and taught are the great and practical virtues of the Gospels; and the reader will observe, that the object of their lives was to enforce and illustrate them by precept and example. "The Essenians (says Josephus) suffered much furious persecution in

propagating their religious views, many powerful men rising up against them, in consequence of differing from them." The same is stated in Acts, of the early Christians.

Josephus and Philo both state that the Essenians worshipped God with peculiar holiness, and that, not by sacrificing animals, but by cultivating purity of heart:—the very features which distinguish the Gospel from Judaism.

The following is another characteristic of the Essenians and first believers:—

"And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart." (Acts ii. 44—46.)

We have authentic evidence that the first Christians in Palestine maintained a community of goods and had all things in common; the same is here stated of the Essenians, "that in opposition to every selfish consideration, they make their goods common property, whence the rich have not greater command than the poor," and "thinking themselves dead to the world, they desired only a blessed immortal existence." Now no other description of people at that time shewed similar communion and holiness; for this practice had not obtained among the Greeks or barbarians, though it had been long established among the Essenians. (Jos. lib. i. 5.)

Josephus and Philo both state, that they separated themselves from the world and lived in *Monai* or Monasteries, and John (xiv. 2) causes Jesus to say, "In my Father's house are many *mansions*" (*Monai*), which word should be rendered "monasteries" or solitary abodes, that were in use among the Essenians long before the Christian era, and shows again the identity of this sect with the Scriptures.

Here let us remark, that the sect of Essenians is no-

where mentioned in the New Testament; for the obvious reason, that the writers of the Scriptures were themselves of that sect, and could not therefore speak of themselves in a work written by themselves.

The term *Christian* was first used by the enemies of Christianity at Antioch by way of reproach; and it was only after a time that the converts assumed this name hated and derided by Jews and Gentiles.

But we refer the reader to the Chapter "Origin of Christianity," at the latter end of the work, for the further examination of this subject; and we now proceed to examine the Sermon on the Mount, and the doctrines promulgated in the Gospels, as put into the mouth of Jesus,—and the reader will at once perceive the extraordinary similarity, nay even identity, between them and the doctrines of the Essenians, as above quoted.

CHAPTER XIII.

SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

THIS discourse is supposed to comprise the essence of the religion of Jesus, as it was also that of the Essenians just described ; and, with his other exhortations and sayings, to include all that was supposed essential in genuine Christianity. We should therefore expect to find here a clear exposition of all those doctrines and duties that are stated to be really necessary for man's salvation.

This discourse consists of a series of exhortations, maxims, and commands, of which some are excellent and useful, but the greater number extravagant and impracticable. They might suit a people like the Essenians, who had given all their goods to feed the poor, took no thought of the morrow, and were in hourly expectation of the end of the world and the advent of the Messiah ; but they are totally unfit for men busily engaged in carrying on the daily concerns and active pursuits of life.

Matthew and Luke's Gospels are the only two which give this discourse ; in the one, it is made to occupy above 100 verses, in the other but 30 : while Matthew represents Jesus as ascending a mountain, and seated thereon during the discourse ; Luke in contradiction to this says, that Jesus came down and stood on the plain !

It is quite impossible to reconcile the instructions contained in this sermon (as it is called) with the circumstances

and duties of real life; for the virtues by which heaven is to be gained, according to Jesus and the Essenians, are not at all calculated for the sphere of this world. It will be seen that, of the many precepts inculcated, there are few of any practical utility to man. Mortification, poverty of spirit, mourning, meekness, grief, sorrow, poverty, hunger, and the love of persecution, are by no means adapted to the common intercourse of life, or fitted to promote the general happiness of mankind. They might suit the austere Essenians, and monks and friars, who resolve to separate themselves from the world; but they are not at all calculated for men who wish to enjoy life with even moderation and temperance. And yet we are told that to those who suffer these things, great will be their reward in heaven.

The love of mortification, of suffering, and of mourning, is by no means a temper of mind likely to foster rational happiness. Suffering, in many instances, may be the lot of man, and when it comes upon us we should bear it like men; but any system of religion or morality which teaches us to consider it a mark of divine favour, or as the sum of earthly happiness, must first require the subjection of those rational faculties by which, in all other cases, we are enabled to judge of good and evil, of pleasure and pain, of happiness and misery.

The same may be said of that passive submission to ill-treatment which is here recommended. It is not calculated for any state of society in which reasonable men would wish to live, for it tends to destroy the best part of our nature, namely, the spirit of resistance to tyranny and oppression. The forgiveness of injuries is a refined virtue, but submission to them is weakness and folly; the one calculated to promote the peace of the world, the other to provoke injury and insult.

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have *thy* cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain." (Matt. v. 38—41.)

This passive and unresisting obedience, which bows down under the yoke of authority and oppression, this duty of unconditional submission, would altogether destroy the best qualities of man, and abolish the inalienable rights of human nature. It is impossible to be carried out, and impracticable to any man in his sober senses.

"And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed *be ye* poor: for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed *are ye* that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed *are ye* that weep now: for ye shall laugh. Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you *from their company*, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven. But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep. Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets." (Luke vi. 20—26.)

Here we have the overstrained devoteeism, the asceticism, and incipient monachism of the Essenians above described. Poverty and hunger, weeping and suffering, are represented as giving a claim to compensation in heaven, and in such terms, that the merit of voluntary privation, and fasting, and penance, may naturally be inferred from them as sacred duties. The religious views of the Essenians generally tended to this extreme, but here it appears exaggerated to a form at variance with the ordinary feelings and necessities of mankind.

The religion of Jesus is the religion of the poor, the afflicted, and the diseased, but, from the denunciations against the rich, is not calculated for the wealthy, the prosperous, or the powerful, because it forbids so many of the enjoyments which nature and art have provided. Our salvation, according to the Gospels, should occupy the whole time of our existence; and a regard for it is incompatible with the indulgence of any of those pursuits which attach men to the world. The love of fame, of wealth, or power, however much directed by reason and humanity, are forbidden in the Christian code. The elegant refinements of nature and art, the pleasures of taste, the beauties of poetry, and the innocent sallies of wit and humour, are all to be repressed, lest they should withdraw us from that continual meditation on heavenly subjects which is required of the candidates for eternal felicity.

Thus "it is (says Burder) that there are so few Christians among the professors of Christianity; for the direct tendency of all religion is to make men either hypocrites or enthusiasts."

"Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap. And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, *shall he* not much more *clothe* you, O ye of little faith? Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day *is* the evil thereof." (Matt. vi. 25, &c.)

Does not this clearly recommend a trust in God for our daily bread, independent of our own exertions, and a submissive prostration to the will of Providence? The argument

from the birds of the air and the flowers of the field puts the matter beyond all doubt; for "they toil not neither do they spin; if God so clothe the grass of the field, shall he not much more clothe you?" The inference here is pointed and impossible to be misunderstood; but the reasoning may be questionable, and disappointment would most assuredly follow the trial!

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal." (Matt. vi. 19.) "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." (xix. 24.)

These are the commands of Jesus regarding worldly wealth, but who obeys them? They have been set at nought by all the world; and even his own vicegerents on earth, the high priests of his Church, are those most assiduous in the accumulation of wealth. They are the lilies of the valley, they toil not, neither do they spin!

The above sentiments, attributed to Jesus, are in reality the sentiments of the poor Essenian Jews, above quoted, who placed the sum of human virtue in passive meekness and rigid self-denial, in poverty, bodily and mental suffering, and a total dereliction of all worldly concerns. The essence of religion they believed to consist in peace, quietness, and tranquillity; and they were so negligent of all earthly affairs, that if the world had been peopled with Essenians, it would soon have come to an end.

"But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." (Matt. v. 44.)

Now this exaggerated sentiment, to love our enemies, and to do good to them that persecute us and despitefully use us, were it even practicable, would neither be a duty nor

a virtue. For those who would despitefully use us must be evil-disposed and bad-hearted men, who may claim our pity, but never can command our love or esteem; it requires of us an impossibility—of virtue, to love vice! But the above is not a sentiment peculiar to the Gospels; for Pythagoras, long before the Christian era, said, “Let men revenge themselves on their enemies only by labouring to convert them into friends;” and Socrates taught “that it was not lawful for a man who had received an injury to revenge it by inflicting another injury.” (Socrat. Memorabilia.)

“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the Law and the Prophets.” (Matt. vii. 12.)

The reader may remark, that this passage, from its naturalness and the universality of its application, has been put into the mouth of Jesus, and declared to be part of the Jewish Law and Prophets. But it is one of those apothegms well known all over the East, and which the Jews learned of the Persians during their captivity. “It may be seen in the Persian Fables of Bilpay (Bedpâé), and in the poems of Hafiz, written (says Sir W. Jones) at least three centuries before our era; and known to the Chinese for ages in the works of their celebrated moralist Confucius.”

“No man can serve two masters: ye cannot serve God and Mammon.” (Matt. vi. 24.) “And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?” (xix. 24, 25.)

And truly we can re-echo the question,—since every day shews this to be totally contrary to experience; for the world contains men of the greatest wealth, and of the strictest morality and piety. But Jesus was no political

economist; and all his views were absorbed in the ideas—a community of property, and the approach of the end of the world—which the Essenians so strictly carried out.

“Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine.” (Matt. vii. 6.)

What is meant by this command? Did not Jesus himself go among publicans and sinners? Who then are the dogs and swine,—the Gentiles? Surely he would not speak thus abusively of his own countrymen, the Jews, to whom he believed his mission to be solely directed; nor do we think this the language by which the Gentiles were to be won.

There is no doubt that Jesus here referred to the Gentiles; and this view is confirmed in his charge to the twelve, in commanding them to limit their call to the house of Israel, and not to go into the way of the Gentiles. This is strange language for the Saviour of the world; and is another instance of the narrow and contracted views entertained by him, so entirely at variance with the idea of a divine mission.*

Jesus' words are in direct opposition to the Mosaical Code, although he is made to say, “I came not to destroy, but to

* Paul however, when he had charge of the Church, took a very different view of this subject, and did not consider the Gentiles as either “dogs” or “swine.” When he examined into this new religion, he saw the great mistake that had been made by Jesus in thus limiting salvation to the small section of mankind living in Judæa, and he at once, in opposition to the command of Jesus and the wishes of the early Christians, insisted on extending its benefits to the Gentiles also, and successfully carried out the measure; although, by doing so, he placed Jesus the Messiah in an anomalous position, shewing his utter want of foresight or foreknowledge, and how ill-qualified he was for carrying out a universal religion.

fulfil" the law. The Laws of Moses were founded on the principles of retaliation and self-defence; but Jesus commands that we submit to violence and fraud.

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have *thy* cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." (Matt. v. 38—42.)

Now this is plain and intelligible, and requires no interpreter; but is it practicable, or consistent with the usages of the world? or agreeable to common sense? On the contrary, so little is it the design of Jesus to inculcate a disregard of the Law of Moses, that he imposes on his followers the strictest observance of it, and declares, "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in nowise pass from the law." Moreover in his observance of the Sabbath, and in many of his sayings and doings, he displays an utter disregard of the law.—Such contradictions as these, such vacillation of mind and change of opinion, veering about by every wind of doctrine, show anything but an inspired or well-regulated mind!

Jesus confirms the law, in respect to *Fasting*, which is now disregarded by all the innumerable sects into which Christianity is split, with the exception of the Catholics. On this subject he is most particular, and gives special directions to his followers for its due observance. "When thou fastest, anoint thine head and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father." (Matt. vi. 17, 18.)—This confirms the Oriental notion that the Deity was to be propitiated by mortifying the body, and is carried out to its utmost limits by the Hindoos all over India.

The threat which Jesus pronounces, that "whosoever shall say, *Thou fool*, shall be in danger of hell fire," (Matt. v. 22,) is very unworthy of his other mild precepts, more especially as he so repeatedly contradicts himself, by using the self-same and other abusive epithets.

"O fools, and slow of heart to believe." (Luke xxiv. 25.) Here Jesus does not hesitate to employ the same expression, which he so awfully denounces and condemns in the above passage. He abuses two poor deluded followers, because they had not been able to trace out, in their own Jewish records, a spiritual and suffering Messiah, in direct opposition to the opinions of their prophets and high priests.—Can we believe that God would make a defective intellect a cause of reproach to any of his creatures!

Of the same character is that barbarous command, "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee," and also, "If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off," which no one in his senses would think of obeying. For although it is stated that some fanatics have made themselves eunuchs for heaven's sake (Matt. xix. 12), a custom not condemned by Jesus himself, yet we have never heard of any of his disciples following the example, not even the enthusiastic Paul, although he complains so grievously of "the thorn in the flesh."

We are told, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works;" and yet this is afterwards contradicted, and we are commanded, "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth, that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly." Which rule are we to follow?

"Thou shalt not be as the hypocrites *are*; but thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."

From this positive command of Jesus, if any one truly believe in its divine authority, he ought not to sanction the meeting in crowds in churches and chapels, like the Pharisees; but, on the contrary, look on this weekly exhibition of public worship as an act of public hypocrisy, denounced by Jesus himself. "But this (says Rev. R. Taylor) would spoil religion as a trade altogether; and therefore, like Christ's professed indifference to the observance of the Sabbath, and his most solemn forbiddance of oath-taking, it becomes a dead letter, which every one reads, but no one respects."

"And now also the ax is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." (Matt. iii. 10; Luke iii. 9.)

This unlucky passage put into the mouths of both John and Jesus has been, alas, the cause of the slaughter of thousands of innocent human beings. It was seized on, and given out by the Inquisition, as the authority for all its diabolical acts; and applied, as a divine command, to sanction the burning of unfortunate heretics, or those who ventured in Catholic countries to exercise the right of private judgment. Jesus surely could not have been aware, when he indulged in this loose and mystifying style, of the awful effects that would in after-ages result from it.—This is one among many instances in this book of the want of prescience or foreknowledge in the reputed author of Christianity.

Luke states (vii. 36) that Jesus was invited by a Pharisee to dine with him, and whilst he sat at meat, a sinful woman of the town came in, washed his feet with her tears, rubbed them with ointment, and wiped them with her hair. The Pharisee was surprised at the liberty Jesus permitted this abandoned woman to take. But Jesus, in despite of his courtesy and hospitality, turned on him, and made this fol-

lowing most ungracious comparison between his host and the woman, saying:—

“I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped *them* with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven *the same* loveth little.—And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.” (44—48.)

Truly this was strange and most uncourteous language for Jesus to use after the hospitable reception he obtained from the Pharisee; and a curious reason for the remission of this abandoned woman’s sins! We cannot wonder then at the contempt which the Pharisees always exhibited towards Jesus, through his displaying such want of temper as shewn in this and many other instances regarding them.

The morality of Jesus is very limited and imperfect, and by no means remarkable for that comprehensive wisdom which embraces all the various relations of life, or which is calculated for the great theatre of the world. The religious views inculcated are very defective in the active virtues, and in not leaving room for that degree of exertion, firmness, and intrepidity, which is daily required for overcoming strong difficulties. Even if they could be carried out, they would leave the weak a prey to the strong.

“Christianity (says Burder) contains things that were new to the world at the time they were promulgated; but those which are new are not practicable, and those which are practicable are not new. The general state of the world from the time of Jesus to the present day, has never in any degree been conformable to the precepts inculcated, which so far proves that his religion is impracticable as a general system!”

CHAPTER XIV.

JESUS' DISCOURSES AND SAYINGS.

MATTHEW relates a second discourse delivered by Jesus to the twelve; and yet among their number we find Judas who betrayed, and Peter who forswore his master. It is strange that he should single them out for the purpose of diffusing his religion through the world, if he had any foreknowledge of their faithlessness, and that they should prove traitors to his cause. And yet John declares that "Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him." (John vi. 64.)

"These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into *any* city of the Samaritans enter ye not: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matt. x. 5, 6.)

The command to these twelve "not to go into the way of the Gentiles, nor to enter into any city of the Samaritans," seems a most extraordinary way of declaring his mission to the world at large, and exposes the narrow views Jesus entertained in confining salvation to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But Jesus was a Jew himself, had been brought up in all the prejudices of his countrymen, and had imbibed all their exclusive ideas of God and his providence; and he firmly believed that the Messiah was promised to them alone, and to be limited to the "chosen people of Israel."

This spirit is again displayed, when the woman of

Canaan beseeches him to cure her daughter, and he refuses, saying, "I am not sent, but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs." (Matt. xv.) Strange language this in the mouth of the Saviour, calling every one but the Jews by the abusive term of dogs and swine, and limiting salvation to a small section of people living in Judea.

After these positive declarations of Jesus that his saving grace was to be limited to the house of Israel (a mere fraction of mankind), and which were afterwards confirmed by the apostles themselves, in their strong opposition to Paul when he proposed to extend his preaching to the Gentiles; the early Christians felt themselves in a dilemma, whose orders to obey—*Paul* or *Jesus*. But a less scrupulous follower soon settled this point, by surreptitiously inserting a few passages at the end of Mark's Gospel, whereby Jesus is made directly to contradict himself, by commanding them, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature!" (Mark xvi. 15.)

This order was never questioned, and the discrepancy was easily got rid of, by explaining it as "an after-thought of Jesus!" But the critical acumen and research of the present age have discovered that this passage is a grave forgery of the early Christians; for that the twelve last verses of Mark are wanting altogether in the early Greek copies, as proved by Jerome and Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, A. D. 371. Gregory states that in the most exact copies of Mark's Gospel, it concludes with the words "for they were afraid," (In. Chr. Res. or. ii. t. 3); and Jerome says, "that in all the Greek copies, the last twelve verses of Mark were wanting." (Ad Hered. Qu. iii. 4.)

Jesus moreover told his disciples to "preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand," (Matt. x. 7.), exactly what

John the Baptist had announced. And Jesus therefore was literally following in his steps. Why did he not announce himself at once as the Messiah, if he really believed himself to be so? The truth is, that he did not at this time indulge in these lofty views or aspire to the Messiahship. He therefore ventured no farther than John, to prepare the way for the Messiah's expected coming. This is clearly shewn in verse 23. "For verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man be come," virtually saying, the Son of Man has not yet come, but that before they had completed their mission he would appear.

"And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city." (Matt. x. 14, 15.)

Jesus, in dismissing the twelve, sends them on their mission unprovided with any of the necessities of life, agreeably to his previous saying, "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink," but at the same time he denounces terrible vengeance on all those who refuse to receive or entertain them; in other words, because they would not receive a number of idle, mendicant strangers into their houses! This is very contradictory to his previous assertion, that we should forgive our brother, even if he offended against us seventy times seven.

"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." (Matt. x. 34.)

| Was this then the object of Jesus' mission on earth, to

set mankind at enmity with each other? If so, then alas, it has been too truly accomplished; for the Christian religion has been a bone of contention and strife in the world for nearly 2000 years. It has, we regret to add, been the cause of more persecution, cruelty, and bloodshed, than any religion ever promulgated. Jesus' words have been indeed truly verified, "he came not to send peace but a sword." *

"And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold *water* only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, He shall in no wise lose his reward." (42.)

In this meagre charge, as in the Sermon on the Mount, all Jesus' views are limited to the Jewish system of rewards and punishments, a means of morally improving mankind of very doubtful acceptance. He urges strongly the necessity of good works, declaring that "the tree is known by his fruits," so directly opposing the mystical doctrines promulgated by Paul, who discarded good works altogether, declaring they were dead, "for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." (Gal. ii. 16.)

Jesus, in his exhortations, is ever holding out rewards for believing one way, and punishment for believing another; in other words, holding out an inducement to resist the force of evidence on the one side, and lending a weight, which does not belong to it, on the other.

* It has been calculated that religious wars among Christians, for differences of opinion, have cost the lives of above two millions of people. The wars to establish Christianity, and those waged against the Turks about the Holy Land, have cost many millions more. The wars of Charlemagne to Christianize the Saxons, and of the Spaniards to convert the Moors and Americans, have deluged the earth with innocent blood. And the Inquisition alone, since its foundation in the 14th century, has burnt above *one hundred thousand* persons of both sexes, besides destroying twice that number by torture and the dungeon.

"He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved, but he that believeth not, shall be damned." (Mark xvi. 16.)

"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." (John iii. 36.)

What can we think of such withering influence, where the fear of consequences is a stronger principle than love of truth; where speculation is paralyzed by the belief that conclusions, honestly arrived at, will be punished by a just and good God, by eternal damnation, or by seeing in every text of Scripture a foregone conclusion, with which the results of inquiry must, at any expense of sophistry and self-deception, be made to square!

"I thank thee, O Father (says Jesus), because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." (Matt. xi.)

This exclamation of Jesus was caused by his utter want of success with the wise and prudent, *i. e.* the respectable and educated men of the country, and his success with the babes or the poor, simple, credulous people who followed him. Here God is exhibited in the partial and unworthy point of view, of opening the eyes of some and blinding those of others; for which Jesus is here represented as returning thanks! In our humble opinion, it would have shewn a better spirit to have prayed to God to open the eyes of the wise and prudent also. But the wise and prudent did not find favour in the Christian dispensation; for reason and philosophy are what seem the least approved in the economy of the Gospel.

The first thing that Jesus required was faith and submission; his first precept was, "believe, and thou shalt be saved;" and this salvation was stated to be obtained, not by wisdom and prudence—the only sure way in the nineteenth

century to arrive at true knowledge—but declared to be imparted by some mystical gift of the Holy Ghost; that is, provided the aspirant submitted implicitly to the terms, *without inquiry*. This gift, it seems, was withheld from the wise and prudent, but imparted most freely to the simple and ignorant, the pliancy of whose belief seemed to have so pleased Jesus, that he is made to utter the above strange apostrophe!

In our finite view of the subject, we should expect Almighty wisdom to have proposed to mankind a faith, free from all difficulties, and open to all understandings; that the proofs should be so clear, as to overcome the incredulity [and reluctance of all classes, however prejudiced. This would have been the very perfection of a miracle, this would have been the real seal of true godliness, requiring no second miracle to support it.

“Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear *thee*, *then* take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.” (Matt. xviii. 15—17.)

This is not the language of Jesus, or he is made to contradict himself in the succeeding verses, where he says we should forgive our brother, even if he offend against us seventy times seven. Besides, there were no such things as churches till many years after!—Again, Jesus is made to say:

“Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” (Matt. xvi. 19.)

The reader will at once perceive that these passages are gross fabrications of the priesthood in after times, for their own aggrandizement, and to give divine authority to their arbitrary acts; many of which certainly required the authority of God himself to palliate.

"Whose sins soever ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever *sins* ye retain, they are retained." (John xx. 23.)

We are taught that God alone can forgive sins, and yet here this tremendous power of retaining and remitting sins is given over by Jesus to weak and fallible men; a power most unfit to be intrusted to human hands, and which has been so shamefully abused by the priesthood in all ages.

An appeal to the understanding is never made in the Gospels; belief is insisted on peremptorily. Jesus expressly assured his followers that he looked on a seeker of evidence as "antichrist profest;" and "that he that was not with him, was against him." He never proposed his doctrines for examination; and a ready acquiescence was always held up for imitation, and as subject of approbation. Conviction was expected to *precede* the evidence,—“Believest thou that I am able to do this?”

“The Pharisees, tempting him, desired a sign,” that is, very naturally asked for some testimonial of the truth of his declared mission. And what did this produce? Why, “he sighed deeply at their perverseness, who were so hard to be convinced,” and abusively called them for their presumption “a wicked and adulterous generation.” Now this desire of a rational evidence for their belief, this seeking after a sign, so far from being criminal or blameworthy, was, in our opinion, their indispensable duty.

The priesthood, the successors in the ministry, we find still continue this same practice, treading carefully in their

Master's steps, and insisting on the ready acknowledgment of the truths of their doctrines, without concession, or time for doubt or deliberation. Now we can easily conceive the propriety of desiring men to believe rationally, to have their reason satisfied, and be able to give an answer of the faith that is in them ; but when threatened imputations of guilt and infliction of punishment are denounced against the individual, if the terms be not accepted, this is such a scheme, as no pretence of authority, human or divine, can sanction.

This peremptory method had, however, the best effect on the ignorant and credulous people that followed Jesus. His disciples were poor fishermen, artless and illiterate, who knew nothing of reasoning, and were ill qualified to manage a controversy ; they knew how to mend a net, but would only have entangled themselves in the meshes of a syllogism. Even Paul, the only one among them possessing the advantages of education, saw the doubtful result of reasoning with the people ; and resolved to lay it aside altogether ; and to make no use of the "wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect."

Jesus in the three first Gospels never ventures to reason, but John (iii. 9.), in his anxiety to bring out his ideal character, causes Jesus to venture on this doubtful ground with Nicodemus, and on being questioned "how a man can be born again," Jesus reproves Nicodemus' ignorance, asserts the value of his own testimony, asks how he would believe if he tells him of heavenly things, says the Son of Man must be lifted up like the serpent, that believing in the Son brings eternal life,—and finally leaves the question where he began, *unanswered!* Is this like the Son of God, or one divinely inspired?

Jesus reproached one of his disciples for his scepticism, "Thomas, because thou hast seen, thou hast believed," in-

timating strongly that his pretensions to his master's favour diminished greatly in proportion to the degree of evidence he had required of him; and that there was no merit in being convinced, when he could no longer avoid the force of evidence. We must confess that to us this would appear to be the best proof of a well-regulated mind.*

It is also recorded that many, who it seems had never heard of Jesus before, believed on him readily "for the saying of the woman," a curious foundation truly for confidence and conviction. "Blessed are they (said Jesus) that have not seen, and yet have believed." These were the followers and believers that suited best for his purpose, and were most encouraged: an intimation to assent, and a dislike to all hesitation and doubt,—this is the temper which Christianity has ever required from its followers, and which has been always graced with marks of its highest approbation.

With what severity did Jesus reprove the doubts of his disciples, for fearing they were going to be drowned, when their vessel was almost sinking; and when it would have been, to all appearance, a sin against common sense to have thought otherwise.—In like manner, Zacharias is said to have been struck dumb, for only hesitating upon what carried, according to the common course of events, the highest face of improbability. (Luke i. 20.)

* Yet, strange to say, only a few years ago, the late Bishop of Calcutta, Daniel Wilson, in one of his discourses in the Cathedral of Calcutta urged this self-same doctrine on his hearers; "that there was no merit in believing on things seen, and that were perceptible to the senses; that the great merit lay in believing on things unseen, and that were beyond our comprehensions. This was the faith that would be acceptable at the throne of grace, to be able to say with the pious and orthodox Tertullian,—'I believe this, because it is impossible.'"—*Credo, qui impossibile est.*

The Scripture test of a true believer was this : " Hereby ye shall know them ; every one that confesseth that Christ is come in the flesh, is of God." (1 John v. 2.) Now this is what is called arguing in a circle, or begging the question ; but in matters of faith it is a most proper and necessary preliminary. " A Christian (says Luther) cannot, if he will, lose his salvation by any multitude or magnitude of sins, *unless he cease to believe* ; for no sins condemn him *but unbelief alone*. Everything else, provided his faith return, or stand fast in the Divine promise given 'in baptism, is *absorbed* in a moment *by that faith*." (Luther de Captivitate, b. ii. 264.)—Here there is no mistake in this exposition of the great Protestant reformer.

According to the Gospels, belief in Jesus as the Messiah seems to be the Alpha and Omega of the Christian religion. It blots out all sins, and cures all maladies, and will even save the vilest malefactor when expiating his crime on the scaffold.

When an apostle was sent forth, he was to receive him that is weak in the faith, to instruct him better, but not to argue with him, "not to doubtful disputations." Should the candidate be refractory, he was told that he would be denied before the holy angels, who denied his judge before men. (See Luke xii. 9.) What then can we think of such a faith, propounded under the restraint of threats and authority ; to be talked to of danger in the decision, and have the rod held out with the lesson ; to have propositions tendered to our reason with penalties annexed ! Yet such, according to the Gospels, is presented as the pleasure and ordinance of God on this subject.

But religion and science, belief and reason, are very remote and opposite qualities, and never can agree. The foundation of philosophy is to reason and doubt, that of religion

to acquiesce and believe. But Jesus on all occasions set his face against science and philosophy. The wisdom of man was declared "to be foolishness with God," and philosophy was denounced by the apostles as "earthly, sensual, and devilish."

The laws of nature and moral relations were, with the philosophers of that age, the general test of all truths that came in their way; and with them revelation was to stand or fall, only so far as it agreed with this standard. On the contrary, people were warned by Jesus and the apostles to beware lest any man spoil them through philosophy and vain deceit. They were told that no man can receive the gospel, except he receive it *as a little child*; in other words, in the impatience of a childish understanding, in all the simplicity of unpractised reason, and with all the subservience and humble acquiescence of a babe, who has its lesson to learn.

"Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy *against* the *Holy Ghost* shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the *world* to come." (Matt. xii. 31, 32.)

What is the meaning of this mysterious and contradictory passage; and what is this unknown sin, on which such awful denunciations are passed; or what is this Holy Ghost that is exalted even above God himself, and is so implacable in its resentment? This passage is so out of character here that we do not hesitate to pronounce it an after fabrication, and introduced for the glorification of this attribute of the Deity,—*His Holy Spirit*, when it was first deified by Paul, and made a distinct person in the Mystical Trinity.

"Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto

thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven : and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven : and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matt. xvi. 8, 9.)

On the above passage is founded that immense mass of deceit, fraud, and folly, which has governed the world for so many ages, under the name of **POPERY**; and which is still retained and enforced by the Catholic clergy at the present day.

It seems that Jesus, when at Cæsarea, inquired of his disciples, Whom do the people say that I am? They answered, That some said he was John, some Elias, and others one of the prophets. Jesus, disappointed at this result of his mission, now put the question to themselves, "But whom say ye that I am?" Peter, rather wiser than the rest, boldly replied, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." So gratified was Jesus, at this recognition of his claims, that he is reported to have blessed Peter, and added, "Thou art Peter, and on this rock (*Petros*) I will build my Church." Words more fatal to the peace and happiness of mankind never were uttered; and had they never been spoken, the world would have had cause to rejoice.

Here Jesus is represented in a most unworthy point of view, as a vain, weak-minded man, without foreknowledge, and therefore eager to find out what was said of him; and so elated at Peter's prompt acknowledgment of his claims, as to sacrifice the dignity of his character and the peace of the world to a paltry pun! Now either Jesus was inspired of God or he was a misled fanatic. If he were the former, he never would have given utterance to an expression that, he must have known, would have involved the world, for eleven hundred years, in torrents of blood; enslaved mankind in the bonds of mental darkness, idolatry, and superstition;

and almost swamped the religion he is said to have sacrificed his life to establish.

Jesus is reported to have urged the people to search the Scriptures, for they are they which testify of me. In those times of ignorance there were few who could either read or write, most men had to trust entirely to the bold assertions of their leaders. Copies of the Old Testament were confined to their priests and the Tabernacle, and were not so common as Tracts and Testaments of the present day. It is questionable if any of the apostles could either read or write, except Luke. Jesus, it is expressly stated in Luke vii. 15, never learned his letters ! and yet it is from such imperfect sources that the Christian religion has been handed down to us !

“ For I have not spoken of myself ; but the Father which sent me he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting : whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.” (John xii. 49, 50.)

The Gospel writers evidently looked on Jesus as an erring mortal like themselves, that could do nothing of himself. This is often displayed, where he says, “ the Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do.” (John v. 19, xii. 49.) When a ruler accosts him as “ Good Master,” he rejects the appellation ; “ Why callest thou me good ? none is good, save one, that is God.” (Luke xviii. 19.) Here Jesus so tenaciously maintains the distinction between himself and God, that he renounces the title of goodness, and insists on its appropriation to God alone.—Again in the 4th Gospel he declares, “ My Father is greater than I.”

Jesus is made to say (Matt. xi. 27), “ All things are delivered unto me of my Father,” implying that he believed he

had an intimate communion of thought and will with the Deity, but *under limitation*, namely, that the attributes of perfect goodness as well as of absolute knowledge (Mark xiii. 32) belonged exclusively to God; and hence the boundary line between divine and human was strictly preserved.

"I and *my* Father are one. Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father: for which of those works do ye stone me? The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God. Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works; that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him." (John x. 30—38.)

Here John, as if conscious that the extent to which he carried the notion of Jesus' incarnation and divinity sounded at variance with the received opinions, and with Hebrew ideas of a Messiah, labours to apologize, to explain, and reconcile; and after some quibbling, ends his vague attempt at reasoning, without proving anything,—saying, "all those are gods to whom the Word of God came!"

There is no doubt that Moses and the Jews, up to the time of the Captivity, were totally unacquainted with the doctrines of the immortality of the soul, or of a life after death, as clearly shown by Bishop Warburton in his work, "The Divine Legation of Moses." It was only during their exile among the Gentiles, that they acquired some knowledge of it, but very imperfectly. For Josephus states that, in the first century, "the Sadducees held with Moses and the Patri-

archs that the soul perished with the body, the Pharisees believed in the transmigration of souls, and the Essenians were the only sect of Jews that had any correct views on the subject. There is therefore something very like the metempsychosis or transmigration of souls in Jesus' mystifying remarks,—“Before Abraham was, I am.” And again, “O Father, glorify thou me with the glory I had with thee before the world was.” (John xvii. 5.) These dreamy notions are extensively spread over the East even at the present day, especially among the Brahmins, who talk of their prehuman and premundane existence, with as much unction and seriousness as if there was no doubt of the fact. In their occasional states of abstraction with the Deity, they will detail, with apparent earnestness, the various forms of previous existence they have already passed through, and those which are yet in the womb of time.

The Pharisees, in the time of Jesus, were believers in this doctrine, that when they died, their souls passed into another body, and thus were BORN ANEW, or as Jesus termed it, “*were born again* ;”—and from them it is likely the above views were derived.

Jesus himself is represented in the Gospels to have had very imperfect views regarding the immortality of the soul. Indeed his knowledge does not appear to have extended beyond the confused opinions entertained by his countrymen, especially the Essenians, namely, that the body and soul both rose together to be reunited at the millennium, when the Messiah came to reign over them ; and from the above quotations, Jesus must have imbibed some of the transmigratory opinions held by the Pharisees.

In the Lord's Prayer, given as the model of his views, there is not once an allusion to the soul, or a life after death ; and on the cross he is made to express himself strictly in the

Jewish belief, "This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise, (not *heaven*, be it observed;) thereby again denying his Messiahship and divinity, by declaring that he had to pass through the same ordeal after death as the rest of the Elect; For Josephus states "that Paradise or Hades was that part of the nether world which, in the interval, was to harbour the souls of the Elect or chosen people, till the coming of the Messiah!"

We have now gone over and carefully examined the meagre doctrines of the Gospels, and must confess that we cannot discover any Revelation, which it is assumed that Jesus announced to the world, that was not known before.

By a *Revelation* we understand any rational moral truth, that when fairly proposed, under proper evidence, should appear so to the mind or understanding of man; and this truth must depend on either reason or testimony.

Now the doctrine of the resurrection, and a future state of happiness or misery, was not a principle peculiar to the Christian revelation; on the contrary, it was known among the Jews, and believed and taught among the sect of Essenians for many years previously. Zoroaster, the great Persian Moral-ist, had taught it 400 years before, and the Persian Magi had received and taught the same doctrines, of the unity of God, a resurrection from the dead, and a future state of rewards and punishments, for centuries before Zoroaster. (*Hyde de Religione Veterum Persarum.*)

In the Christian dispensation, that which had not been taught before was salvation through Jesus, as the Christ or Messiah who was to restore the kingdom to Israel and sit on the throne of David. But Jesus never took on himself this character, as the Messiah or restorer of the kingdom of Israel. On the contrary, when the question was put to him

by Pilate, he unequivocally renounced it, by declaring that "*his kingdom was not of this world*," and that he had no such worldly or ambitious views, as he had been charged with by the priesthood.

As to the Christian system of faith, it would appear to be a sort of denial of the Almighty, it professes to believe in a *Man* rather than in *God*—a species of *anthropomorphism*. It introduces between man and his God an intermediate person, called a Redeemer, a belief in whom is all that is required in the Christian dispensation for the salvation of mankind.

A message from the Supreme Being ought surely to be conveyed in the clearest and most unambiguous language; and never could give rise to the innumerable contradictory doctrines that the Gospels contain. All is uncertain, and obscure, and contradictory; and the precepts are delivered in so loose and undefined a manner as to be incapable of conveying clear and definite directions to any one. Nor have we seen anything in the exhortations or sayings attributed to Jesus that would indicate a man of a superior mind, or one inspired of God.

Now if a knowledge of the pure and unadulterated Scriptures, be of such serious importance to mankind, it seems most unaccountable, that so many spurious Gospels should have been permitted in the very times of the apostles, and such contradictory opinions prevail regarding Jesus' person and doctrines; and that the apostles, if inspired, should have so sadly neglected their duty, as not to furnish their followers with an attested copy of the exclusively divine Scriptures.—This is very unlike what we should be led to expect from Almighty Wisdom!

So far from being of use as a rule of conduct whereby to guide men in faith and practice, the Scriptures would seem

to have been written, not to settle a long vexed question, but to distract and perplex men's minds. This is fully displayed in the present confused state of what is called the "Christian Church," split into innumerable sects and factions, all warring the one with the other! This of itself would prove its human origin, and that it could not be a revelation of the all-wise Creator, whose dicta could only convey one meaning.

Moreover, even if any revelation could be the means of knowing the Deity and his laws, such means could only be temporary and successful for a time. All that passes from hand to hand in human society is subjected to successive alterations by the different means of relating it, by vicissitudes of languages, by the love of the marvellous, by the disposition to deception and exaggeration; by the different views taken of the same thing, by the varieties of thought and understanding, of interest or prejudice; so that, to insure any stability to a revelation, the nature of man should first be completely changed.

But, taking man as he is, every revelation must inevitably become, in time, a compound of fable and dreams, diversely modified by the different minds which announce it, which interpret it, or receive it. What difficulties do we not meet with to obtain a correct statement of the mere facts, which daily take place, in our own time, among the society in which we live? Do we not find that whatever takes place in the morning, in any part of town or country, is differently related by different people, and often becomes a mass of contradiction and falsehood before it comes to us in the evening. How few men are there even now who can give a faithful or intelligible account of what they have seen, or what they have heard others relate. How, then, can a revelation preserve any permanency, in the course of centuries, passing through nations of ignorant people or enthusiastic fools, be-

fore it comes down to us? Thus, even admitting that there could have been, once upon a time, a divine and true revelation, that revelation would soon become corrupted, inevitably disfigured, and must become by degrees such a mixture of contradiction, as would make it impossible to re-establish the original truth; and consequently could only be an absurd, ridiculous medium, incompatible with the nature of man, or with the immutable decrees of an all-powerful Deity.*

"It is indisputable (says Bishop Gleig) that no doctrines which clearly contradict any truth which has been demonstrated by the light of nature can have been revealed by the Father of all Lights." (Study of Theology.)

* "Revelation (says Burder) is so contradictory to reason, that had it not been first promulgated and received in an age of ignorance and credulity, it never would have obtained credit in more enlightened times. It is somewhat singular that all revelations have originated among nations most remarkable for their gross ignorance. How comes it that we hear of no revelations among the Greeks and Romans? because the imposture would soon have been detected and exposed!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

JESUS is stated to have prescribed a form of prayer for his followers, which has been upheld by all Christians as the model of a prayer, and named for its excellence "the Lord's Prayer." Matthew introduces it in the Sermon on the Mount, but Luke states it to have been delivered by Jesus on his last journey to Jerusalem. The other two Gospels take no notice of it whatever.

On examination, it will be found that this prayer is a purely Jewish emanation, and does not contain a single expression that would lead us to conclude, that the individual who is reported to have uttered it, had an idea beyond the crude and human notions of God and his attributes, entertained by the Hebrews. But as it is stated to have been spoken by Jesus, it enables us to see further the views of God and of religion entertained at the time of the promulgation of Christianity.

"*Our Father which art in heaven.*"—This is the primitive and ancient notion, reiterated throughout the Old Testament, of the abode in which Jehovah was said to reside. It gives a very unworthy idea of the omnipresence of the Deity, by thus limiting him to a certain locality, but one quite in accordance with the human views of the Lord Jehovah entertained by the Jews; namely, that he was an Almighty being, influenced by human feelings and human passions, who resided in a place called heaven, which, from their ignorance of sci-

ence, they placed in the firmament; and where he was attended by a host of minor deities, called angels.

"Hallowed be thy Name."—This is also a purely Jewish conception, which the Israelites carried to an extreme in their exclusive worship of Jehovah. They believed that there was some peculiar virtue in the very letters that composed his name, and that this name was not to be uttered except on the most solemn occasions. Indeed the whole of the Jewish worship consisted in idle ceremonials of their tabernacle, where it was believed that the Priest was in constant *private* communion with his God, and the only one that was permitted to communicate with him or call on his name. The building of altars, the slaughtering of cattle, the keeping Jehovah's name sacred (secret), was the sum and substance of their religion; and this last idea Jesus adhered to and introduced into his prayer.

Now among the Hindoos, Mahomedans, and other Oriental nations, they are taught, as the greatest merit, to have God's name constantly on their lips, to do everything in his name, and even to sanctify their children by giving his name to them in baptism.—But after all, what is in a name? it matters little whether we call on God as Jehovah, Jove, or Lord, Gwadma, Ram, or Allah, provided we act in obedience to what we conscientiously believe to be his will.

"Thy kingdom come."—This supplication the Jews had been using in their tabernacles for years, calling on the Lord to establish his kingdom on earth; and refers to the coming of the Messiah to sit on the throne of David. It clearly shews, that Jesus did not, at this period, look on himself as the promised Messiah, or he never would have so committed himself, as to teach his followers to pray for his coming, if

he had believed that the Messiah had already appeared in his own person!

The Jews had most narrow views of the Almighty Creator; they believed that he had really limited his saving grace to "his chosen people"—a paltry fraction of mankind,—that they were the only people he cared for; and that the whole world was comprised in the "*Orbus Judaicus*;" that a great prince or Messiah was to restore their kingdom, sit on the throne of David, and judge—the world? No! only the twelve tribes of Israel.—Now these were the views, be it remembered, of Jesus himself.

"Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."—Here again is the Jewish human idea of God and his abode; that he had a distinct place of residence, and was attended by a number of spiritual beings, called angels, whose conduct in heaven, it would seem, had been anything but satisfactory.

Is it not surprising then, that Jesus should have ventured on so very doubtful a comparison, in praying, "that God's will should be done on earth, as it is in heaven," when he must have known that the very angels, the reputed inmates of heaven, had carried out the will of God so imperfectly, as to rebel against his authority, and be driven out of heaven? Had Jesus already forgotten the temptation scene with the rebellious prince of darkness?

Does it not appear strange then, that Jesus, in the face of all these divine truths, should have boasted of the perfect submission of the inhabitants of heaven to the will of God, and offered it, in his prayer, as an example to man?

"Give us this day our daily bread."—It has been shewn, that the Jews never had an aspiration beyond the pursuit

of worldly objects, nor a wish beyond the acquirement of "daily bread," the propagation of their species, and the extension of their temporal power.

Here this prayer, instead of raising man's thoughts to spiritual blessings, to "that bread which giveth life, and to that spirit which illumines the soul," simply limits itself to daily bread to support the perishable body. What an opportunity was here lost of directing their minds to the true wants of man, the true object of all prayer, the elevation of the soul above all earthly objects, the utter worthlessness of all transitory enjoyments, and the raising the thoughts from nature up to nature's God!

But, alas! Jesus' auditors were Jews, poor half-starved creatures, to whom a loaf of bread was the greatest blessing, and who would have been scarcely satisfied (without a miracle) with spiritual food. For, as we have shewn, the immortality of the soul, at this time, was little believed, and less understood, by the Jewish people. The Pharisees knew but little about it, and the Sadducees totally disbelieved it; nor had their God Jehovah thought proper to enlighten them much on that mysterious subject.

"And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us."—Here an offer is made to enter into a compromise with the Deity, and quite in the Jewish spirit, —a "quid pro quo,"—if we forgive other people their trespasses, on this condition we expect you will forgive ours! The prayer does not acknowledge man's entire unworthiness, and that he cannot, of himself, do any good thing; on the contrary, it assumes that we can do something good, and offers it in return for God's forgiveness.

Jesus, immediately after, confirms this by saying, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will

also forgive you ; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again ;" (Matt. vi. 14 ; vii. 2.) thus clearly shewing, according to Jesus' moral views, that man was to be judged by the Deity according to his works. (Matt. vi. 14 ; vii. 2.)

Where then was original sin ?—where the necessity of a Saviour ?—where of an atonement ? Is not this strange language, if Jesus really looked on himself as a propitiatory sacrifice for the sins of man ?

"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."—

It was one of the earliest ideas of the Hebrew people, that God was the author of evil, as well as of good, and possessed within himself both these opposite qualities ; and Jesus here confirms the belief in this doctrine. The Persians were the only people, in those primitive times, who had any just views on this subject, and who separated these two principles, declaring God to be the author of good, and Shytan (Satan), a new god whom they created, the author of evil.

Is it not strange, then, that Jesus should still adhere to this old Jewish doctrine, and believe that God was the author of evil, and often inflicted evil on his people, or led them into temptation of evil, to see how the opposite qualities of the human mind would be influenced ? as if God were not omniscient, to read the hearts of all. Now this was placing the Deity in a very anomalous position, and causing him to act from apparently unworthy motives ; for he knew well the work he had created ; he also knew how far it would act in accordance with his wishes ; and therefore the application of a test would seem to be a cruel and unnecessary act.

We find it accordingly reported in Genesis, that when God created man, he resolved to lead him into the temptation of doing evil, that is, to test him, and see how far the work, which had just come out of his hands, was trustworthy; although he had previously declared himself well satisfied with the excellence of it. But it seems that man could not stand the trial; and God had the mortification to find that he had entirely failed in the work he had created. Again, he resolved to try Abraham, and ordered him to murder his only son. But in this instance, it seems he was not disappointed, for Abraham would most willingly have complied had he not been prevented. Lastly, the test was applied to Jesus, and he was specially taken into the wilderness by God, and given into the hands of the devil himself.—But mankind have now acquired more just views of the Deity than people had in those days; for to suppose that God would lead mankind into the temptation of committing evil, destroys the very essence of the God-head, omniscience, and fore-knowledge.

“For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,” &c. This truly is a primitive production. It is a prayer indeed of universal applicability; for it might have been used by Plato, Pythagoras, or Socrates; by Jew, Gentile, or Deist, without compromising any of their principles. It deals exclusively in temporal things, but avoids spiritual things altogether. It simply asks for the advent of the Messiah, food for the body, and a conditional forgiveness of sins. It is, as Pope truly designates it, “an universal prayer,” and contains not one particle of *spiritual* Christianity in its composition.

The Rev. Joseph Mendham, in alluding to the striking similarity between this prayer and certain portions of the

ancient Jewish prayers, says, that if the corresponding passages in the latter were collected together, they would nearly produce the Lord's Prayer. They are as follows, with the authorities annexed.

"*Our father which art in heaven*; (Maimonides, in *Tephillot*.)—*Thy name be sanctified*; (Capellus, ex *Euchologiis Judæorum*.)—*Thy kingdom reign*; (Drusius, ex libro *Musar*.)—*Do thy will in heaven*; (Bab. *Berachoth*.)—*Forgive us our sins*; (In almost all their prayers.)—*Lead us not into the hand of temptation*; (In *Libro Musar*. apud *Drusium*.)—*Deliver us from Satan*; (In *precibus Judæorum*.)—*For thine is the kingdom, and thou shalt reign gloriously, for ever and ever*; (In their *Liturgies*.)"

"Prayers, strictly formed on the above model, would be considered by all orthodox Christians, as extremely deficient, and by no means an adequate exhibition of the principles of Christian devotion. It does not contain one recognition of the medium of acceptance, nor in short of any doctrine peculiarly Christian. It is materially deficient, as a Christian prayer, on the doctrine of the Spirit's influence, which is one of the distinguishing tenets of the Gospel dispensation.—Strictly speaking it is a *Jewish prayer*." (Redford on *Ex-tempore Prayer*.)

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LAST JUDGMENT.

JESUS, in describing the Last Judgment, explains to his disciples the qualifications requisite for admission into heaven; and we find them all of a practical nature, all depending on good works, and not a word of *Original Sin*, or the necessity of an *Atonement*. So that we have here again a confirmation of his former declaration, of what was required of man to be an inheritor of life eternal.

"Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

"Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." (Matt. xxv. 34—46.)

Here, according to the Gospel reporters, we have the sum and substance of Jesus' religious views, and all that is required to be an inheritor of life eternal; and the reader will observe that not one of those doctrines, that have bewildered mankind for the last 2000 years, is touched on, or even remotely alluded to.

We are therefore forced to the conclusion, that all those doctrines of which modern Christianity consist, and which are not found in the exhortations, sayings, and prayers attributed to Jesus, but were introduced by Paul and other innovators afterwards, may be called Christianity, but are not the religion of Jesus.

We take his religion, not from the fancies of Paul or Apollos, but from the instructions found in the Gospels, and attributed to Jesus. If we do not find it there, then we may fairly conclude that the religion of the present day is not the religion "taught by Jesus." It is, as the philosophic Bentham truly designates it, "of Paul, not Jesus."

Let the reader but compare the instructions in the Gospels, as to the requisites in a seeker after the kingdom of heaven, with the mystical and incomprehensible doctrines laid down by Paul and others in the Epistles, and taught by modern Christians, and he will see that Paul has erected quite a new religion (under the name of Christ), on the basis of the simple precepts of the Gospels; and that modern Christians have no pretensions to be considered the followers of Jesus, but are the promulgators of doctrines that never emanated from him, and are not to be found in the Gospels.

CHAPTER XVII.

PARABLES OF JESUS.

FROM the remotest ages, the strenuous exertions of the priesthood have ever been, to veil religion from the prying curiosity of the people, in parables, and allegories, and fables.

It has been the invariable custom of priests to deliver their opinions and responses in obscure, mysterious, and oracular language, so as to astonish and at the same time mystify the mind. This display of learning, in the exclusive hands of the priesthood, was naturally regarded by the people, under the influence of ignorance and superstition, as an evidence of supernatural power.

There were two languages among the sacerdotal tribe, the one that which the priests explained to the *initiated* or disciples,—the other, that which they gave to the *vulgar* or people, wrapped up in allegories and parables and fables; that, as Jesus explains it to his initiated followers, “seeing, they may see and not perceive, and hearing, they may hear and not understand.” (Mark iv. 12.)

“All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.” (Matt. xiii. 34, 35.)

And when the disciples asked him, why he spake to them in this obscure way, he answered, “Because it is given unto

you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them (the multitude) it is not given." (Matt. xiii. 11.)

Now it is quite amazing that Jesus, merely to fulfil a prophecy, should have followed this truly absurd custom, defeating the very object he professed to have in view, namely, that of clearly explaining his doctrines to the people, so as to convince them of the truth of his mission; or that the Deity should not have prompted him to give his instructions in plain, simple, and intelligible language! The consequence was, as might be expected, that by thus mystifying his audience, and speaking to them literally "in an unknown tongue," it is stated, they always "went away amazed and wondering at his words;"—and truly we ourselves do not marvel at it!

Mark relates (chap. iv.) that a great multitude was assembled, and Jesus taught them many things by parables; and he concludes with this sage remark,—“He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” The multitude certainly might have ears to hear, but so long as he spake in parables, they could not understand; so that all this teaching was in vain, for even his disciples could not comprehend him!

When he was alone, his disciples asked him for an explanation of the parables he had just delivered; when Jesus replied, “Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without (the multitude), all these things are done in parables: that seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing, they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and *their* sins forgiven them.” (Mark iv. 11, 12.)

Verily this principle of deceiving the vulgar is a language quite incomprehensible to our minds; and had such a passage, as the above, been found in any other work, we should not have hesitated to conclude with Festus, on nearly

a similar occasion, that the person reported to have uttered it, was "beside himself."

What then did Jesus consider the object of his mission? why did he call on the people to repent, if he did not wish that they should be converted and their sins forgiven them? Jesus assumed that he was explaining the mysteries of the kingdom of God. We would put the question, in sober seriousness, to our readers, if from the many parables on that subject any new light has been elicited?—But we proceed to examine these parables.

Parable of the Lost Sheep. "Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance." (Luke xv.)

It would appear from this, that God is better pleased with a reprobate sinner who is penitent, than with the good and upright man, who has always held the even tenor of his ways in righteousness and peace.

Here the doctrine of forgiveness, upon repentance, is urged in such a manner, as to countenance rather than guard against the dangerous exaggeration, that the repentant sinner is in a more desirable condition than the just man who needs no repentance; and that there is some truth in the old adage, the greater the sinner the greater the saint. This would scarcely be the decision of a just and upright

judge, nor would it meet the approval of the strict moralist of modern times. The only doctrine which Jesus here promulgates is simply *repentance*, and he even acknowledges that there are many "which need no repentance;" shewing that that fantastic doctrine of *Original Sin* is an after-fabrication of Paul; but by no means belongs to the religion as said to be taught by Jesus.

Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke xv.).—This parable is a continuation of the erroneous reasoning of the Lost Sheep, and is intended as a comparison between the sinful publican and the Pharisee; but we must confess it does not much improve matters.—The parable is briefly thus:

A certain man had two sons, between whom he divided his property. The elder remained at home, and the younger went abroad, where he wasted all his substance in riotous living. In hunger and want he returned to his father, saying,—

"Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." (Luke xv. 21.)

"But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on *his* feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill *it*; and let us eat, and be merry. Now his elder son was in the field: and . . . he heard musick and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to *his* father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf." (Luke xv. 21—23; 25—30.)

The encouragement here given to the virtuous elder

brother seems in reality too limited, in comparison with the festive welcome of the prodigal, whose repentance arose merely from distress and hunger; and as yet had not proved his sincerity by any reformation.

The grovelling humility of the sinful Publican which the prodigal represents, unaccompanied by any approved change of conduct, leaves us in doubt whether to prefer it to the assumed righteousness of the Pharisee, with whom the elder brother is compared. This estimation of repentance, without regard to its fruits, shews the leaning of Jesus to the asceticism of the Essenians, who considered the abasement of man, both in body and mind, as the best preparative for the favours of heaven!

Parable of the Unjust Steward.—In the following parable of the unjust steward and in that the unjust judge we have an exposition, on gospel principles, of what the character of God was considered to be by Jesus; and the reader will perceive the very imperfect views here entertained of God and his attributes.

A certain rich man, having suspicion of the honesty of his steward, desires him to give an account of his stewardship, that he may be discharged. The steward, to make friends for himself, sends for all his master's debtors, and gives them receipts for the one half of the sums due, thereby defrauding his master to a large amount. (Luke xvi.)

Our modern ideas of justice would pronounce this to be a grossly fraudulent act; but what is Jesus made to say to this transaction, or what decision does he pronounce on this unjust act of the steward? Why! "The lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light."

Now we do acknowledge that this confounds all our ideas of right and wrong. In the above parable the *Master* is meant to be a representation of God, and the *Steward* of man; and the attempt of Jesus to give a rational explanation defies all criticism. For when he adds, "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much," it would appear as if the steward was set forth as a model, deserving, in some way or other, the praise of faithfulness. And when Jesus adds, "that no servant can serve two masters," the intended inference seems to be that this steward had attached himself to the rightful one, and was to be held up to the admiration of mankind.

Parable of the Unjust Judge.—Now the above parable, to be properly understood, must be followed by that of the unjust judge, which is delivered to us by Jesus with the solemn command, "Hear what the unjust judge saith." The parable is briefly thus:

There was in a certain city a judge, who feared neither God nor man; and a widow came to him, saying, "Avenge me of mine adversary." But he put her off till she wearied him out by her entreaties; and the judge at length said, "Though I fear not God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubleth me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me." And the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge saith." (Luke xviii.)

These are truly strange exhibitions of the divine character; and the morality of both the above parables is very doubtful indeed. The "unjust judge" teaches those in authority over us to be indifferent to the petitions of the people, and to act from no consideration of right and wrong,

but their own personal ease and convenience; and to yield to a petitioner only to relieve themselves from the annoyance of his suit.

For those in humble and dependent situations, the example of the unjust steward, whose conduct is so highly approved, is this: that we may cheat and defraud our masters as we please, if done so cleverly and so "wisely," as Jesus expresses it, as to elicit the admiration of our employers! This Spartan principle is the rule of conduct too common, alas! all over the East; but which, although recommended here by so high an authority, cannot be too strongly deprecated by every well-regulated mind.

Jesus' explanation of the parable of the "Unjust Judge" is equally unintelligible and ambiguous as that of the "Unjust Steward." It is this: "And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you he will avenge them speedily." (Luke xviii. 7.)

Here we have an exposition of that strange Calvinistic doctrine of Election and Reprobation which distinguishes the writings of Paul; since its whole argument is, that God would avenge his own elect or chosen people, not with any reference to the justice of their cause, but merely because they were the elect.*

God is here represented as acting in a capricious and arbitrary manner, and exhibiting the human passions of re-

* "According to the Calvinists, Christ died only for the elect, and one of the fundamental doctrines of the Calvinistic school is, that none are redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only; and that the doctrine of universal redemption reflects on the wisdom, justice, and power of God, and robs him of his glory!" (Gill's Body of Divinity.)

venge and injustice, as depicted in the Old Testament, both opposed to the tests of true godliness.

Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.—A certain rich man who fared sumptuously, and a beggar who lay at his gate full of sores, and who desired to be fed from the remnants of the rich man's table,—both died. The beggar was conveyed by angels into heaven, and the rich man taken into hell. And when the rich man remonstrated at this apparently arbitrary decision, what was the reply? "Son, remember that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." (Luke xvi.)

This is another instance displaying the Gospel writer's imperfect acquaintance with the attributes of the Deity, and shews also his ignorance of the true nature of man. Here the guilt of the one would appear to be in his wealth, and the merit of the other in his poverty. Here the measure of future recompense is not the amount of good done or wickedness perpetrated, but of evil endured and fortune enjoyed. This, however, quite agrees with the views of the Essenian Jews, and of Jesus in his previous discourse, where he says, "Blessed be ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God: But woe unto you that are rich, for ye have received your consolation." (Luke vi. 20—24.)

These are strange lessons of morality, stated as coming from Jesus, who is by some believed to have been inspired by God, and by others looked on to be an emanation of the Deity; and he here declares the law, that according to our comforts in this world so will be our punishment in the next. In the doctrines of the Essenians also, poverty and suffering were the greatest of virtues, wealth and luxury the worst of crimes. Hence the rule carried out by the early Christians,

and the Catholics in all times, that there was merit in torturing their bodies and mortifying the flesh, as it materially assisted in purifying the soul.

Jesus concludes the parable thus: The rich man entreats that one may be sent from the dead, to give warning to his brethren of his unhappy fate; for "if one went to them from the dead they will repent." The reply is curious: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." What then was the object of Jesus, leaving the bosom of his father, and taking all this trouble of preaching, and exhorting, and performing mighty works, when they already had Moses and the prophets?

When a certain ruler asked Jesus "what he must do to inherit eternal life," his reply was to this effect: "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell all thou hast and give it to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. For verily I say unto you, A rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. xix. 16. 23.)

And again,—“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” When his disciples heard this they were exceedingly amazed, saying,—“Who then can be saved?” and truly mankind may echo the question! (Matt. xix. 24, 25.)

Now the reader will observe again, that the doctrines here promulgated are the doctrines of the Essenian Jews, formerly alluded to, who separated themselves from all worldly pursuits, gave all their money to feed the poor, and occupied all their time in praying and instructing the people; depending altogether on alms for their support. They were therefore violent against the rich and wealthy, and kind and

considerate towards the poor, denouncing the one and flattering the other. (See Matt. v. ; Luke vi. 20.)

This sect is described by Philo and Josephus as going about and spreading themselves and their doctrines all over Judæa, even to Egypt, at the very time when the Gospel narratives were written; and there is no reason to doubt, that the person called Jesus was one of their order, whom they ultimately elevated to the Messiahship. This gave a strength and weight to their doctrines among the Jews, in being able to announce the advent of the Messiah of their prophets, who was to deliver Israel and reign over them. But when, before Pilate, they found that Jesus disclaimed this high honour, and declared "My kingdom is not of this world," they all turned in a moment against him and cried out, "Crucify him! crucify him!" and left him to his fate,—even Peter denied all knowledge of him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON MIRACULOUS POWERS.

IF the founders of Christianity did not appeal to men's reasoning faculties, but spoke under the obscure veil of parables, it may be said, that they were endowed with a readier and more decisive mode of conviction, and one more suited to the capacities of their audience, namely, by an immediate appeal to their senses; and by performing works before their eyes, beyond the reach of human power to produce.

But let it be remembered that miracles, time out of mind, are stated to have been performed, as well in favour of false doctrines as of true, by Pharaoh's magicians as well as by Moses, by the Jews as well as by Jesus; and it would be hard to say wherein the specific difference lies between the miracles of Moses and those of Pharaoh's magicians, or between those of Jesus and the miracles wrought by Simon Magus and Apollonius of Tyana.

The devil himself is exhibited in Scripture as having the power to perform miracles, as shewn in the temptation scene in the wilderness; and in the appearance of Samuel after his decease to Saul. So that miracles are never, of themselves, any certain marks of a true religion! Scripture itself confesses this, when it warns us of "lying wonders and false Christs;" tells us to take the utmost care and caution what we give credit to; and recommends to us the farther and more secure trial of them by what it calls "their fruits."

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certain degree of previous confidence and persuasion as to have been stipulated beforehand, to entitle these cures to be listened to or regarded at all. When we find them confirmed, it was still "first perceiving the patient had faith to be healed." And whenever there was the least room to distrust this preparatory proposition, the patient was dismissed with a conditional remedy, which was to take effect only in proportion to the extent of his belief: "according to thy faith be it unto you." And in another instance, Jesus himself attributes the entire efficacy of the miracle to the patient's belief and confidence,—"thy faith hath made thee whole," (Mark v. 34.; Luke viii. 48.)

We find in modern times, that all pretenders to miracles adopted this gospel plan; and that great miracle-worker, Prince Hohenlohe, who performed so many well-attested miracles throughout Europe in 1821, invariably sheltered himself in his failures, under the pretext of a want of faith in the patient.—Now we ourselves have the most profound contempt for these miracles of Hohenlohe, and yet we are expected to have the most perfect belief in those related in the Gospels on no better foundation.

We are told (Matt. xiii. 58) that Jesus "did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief." Here again we have the acknowledgment, that belief was essential to the success of a miracle. But we do confess that the excuse here made, "because of their unbelief," appears to be the strongest possible reason for Jesus increasing and multiplying his works, if he really thought these poor benighted people in the least deserving of his farther care and consideration.

We might not unreasonably expect to see something more of the long-suffering character of the Saviour displayed in their behalf. We may well presume that he who left the bosom of the Father, purely to give us this important information, would never have so capriciously neglected an errand that cost him so dear to undertake; or have desisted from it on account of their unworthiness or unbelief.

"Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe," (John iv. 48.) Now as this saying is put into the mouth of Jesus, we may infer that the Gospel writers found it necessary to supply their hearers with a plentiful share of such signs and wonders.

In proportion to the distance of time and place, this species of imposition became more easy. Accordingly, we find that there are but few allusions to miracles in the Epistles, which were written *first*; abundant accounts of them in the three first Gospels, written some fifty or sixty years after; but in John's Gospel, written above a hundred years after, bolder and more gross stories of miracles appear, as well as more confident appeals to them. The authors had been, for many years, accustomed to have exaggerated and fictitious accounts of the acts of Jesus, and could not but observe their efficacy in promoting the faith of the Church. Hence the temptation to adopt and invent fresh stories of miracles; and in proportion to the distance of time and place this became the more easy.

Historical veracity did not seem of much importance to the writers of the Gospels; for John had declared in Epistle ii. 22, "He only is a liar, who denieth Jesus to be the Christ," evidently shewing, that he considered the end would sanctify the means.

It is a curious fact that, with the exception of that anomalous one of the fig-tree, the Gospel writers give us no

specific account of any one miracle from the period of Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem till his death, as any attempt to impose on the citizens of the holy city would have been easily detected, and as easily exposed. The miracles attributed to Jesus, therefore, agree with the assumed miracles of all others in one remarkable circumstance: they were performed among classes least capable of distinguishing the natural from the supernatural—facts from fiction.

But after all, even supposing that such anomalies as miracles had been performed, to what do they amount? They were merely conviction at that instant of time, and on the spot when and where they were exhibited. But when either time or place are wanting, all the force of evidence must fail. "Sufficient unto the day is the evidence thereof;" but no more. "A miracle (says Lord Brougham) is no miracle at second hand, and is no proof of divine power, but merely that one man can do what another cannot do." Look at the modern necromancers,—why, they would deceive the very Elect.

These miracles, if performed, could be no demonstration to any that were not actually and personally present at the time. All that we can possibly know, at this remote period, may be tested by the miracles of modern times, namely, that many persons afflicted with nervous and other diseases, who were powerfully acted on through the medium of their nervous system, by their faith, or belief, or confidence in the operation, were often relieved; and that others, through ignorance or credulity, were deceived by false appearances.

The testimony of *sight* therefore is, by its nature, not to be communicated. The light of conviction, thus received, can extend no farther than to the eye-witness; and if miracles were necessary in the infancy of Christianity, they are equally so still, and will be so to the end of time.

Whenever they cease, the authority of the evidence, which depends on them, ceases also. Now the Church of Rome seems to have been well satisfied on this point, and to have been fully aware, that if miracles ever cease, the same cause still continuing, it would tend to shew that they never existed, and cannot be produced as substantial and conclusive testimony of the truth of a religion.

The circumstance of continuance, then, is essential to the truth and force of the previously asserted miracle. The Romish Church, seeing this, pretends to the constant and uninterrupted succession of miracles to the present day; and if multitudes of well-educated people can be deceived now, how much more easily could they have been misled in times of ignorance, bigotry, and superstition! The probability is always far greater, as Hume has shewn, that the witness was deceived or imposed on, than that the laws of nature were suspended or altered.

“There is not (says Dr Middleton) a single historian of antiquity, whether Greek or Latin, who has not recorded oracles, prodigies, prophecies, and miracles on the occasion of some memorable events,—many of these are attested in the gravest manner, and by the gravest writers; and were firmly believed at the time by the populace. Yet it is certain, that there is not one of them which we can reasonably take to be genuine; not one, but what was either wholly forged, or improved and magnified into something supernatural.” (Middleton’s Free Inquiry.)

This admission seriously affects the credit of all miracles in all ages; for although we may admit the genuineness of natural events or occurrences, yet we can only laugh at the fictitious miracles in history, which are merely superadded to advance or strengthen some doubtful statement or monstrous hypothesis.

“We should therefore exercise an unremitting caution in receiving improbable relations, whether supported by the authority of particular historians, or vouched by the general belief of mankind. Here our sagacity should never fail us; here our scepticism is never hurtful,—to exercise extreme caution in receiving all startling narratives, to which our assent is so frequently asked, and which hitherto has been as unthinkingly yielded.” (Brougham’s Nat. Theology.)

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MIRACLES OF JESUS.

WE now proceed to examine, in detail, these "marks and seals of Christianity," as its advocates call the miracles, and see whether the marvellous tales related are so clearly divine and so well authenticated, as to be self-evident without the aid of reason.

"The authority (says Dr Middleton) of a writer who affirms any questionable fact, must depend on the character of his veracity and his judgment. As far as we are assured of the one, so far are we assured that he does not willingly deceive us; and from our good opinion of the other, we persuade ourselves that he was not deceived himself. But in proportion as there is reason to doubt of either, there will always be reason to doubt of the truth of what he delivers. Nay, in many cases, the want of judgment alone has all the same effect as the want of veracity towards invalidating the testimony of a witness, especially in cases of an extraordinary or miraculous notion, where the weakness of men is the most liable to be imposed upon; and the more so, as it happens to be joined to the greater piety and simplicity of manners." (See Middleton's *Miraculous Powers*.)

We shall now apply this rule to the cases before us, and examine what proofs of a sound judgment and strict veracity are to be found in the miraculous statements contained in the Gospels.

Among the miracles detailed are many instances shewing the manner in which ordinary events are converted into extraordinary or miraculous ; in which, whatever conclusion we may come to regarding the *judgment* of the writers, we can have no hesitation in deciding on the question of their *veracity*. Indeed, Middleton candidly acknowledges, that the early Christian writers looked on it to be a praiseworthy act, to invent and countenance the most palpable falsehoods in support of Scripture.

The first example we present is the account of Herod's death, as detailed in the Acts of the Apostles, compared with the same account as related in the Jewish War, by that accredited historian Josephus :

Herod's Death.—Josephus relates that Herod, when at Cæsarea, attended a festival given in honour of Cæsar, where he was suddenly taken ill with inflammation of his bowels ; and seeing an owl, a bird of ill omen, sitting on a rope above his head, he looked on it to be a messenger of evil tidings ; and declared to those about him, that he knew his illness would prove fatal.—He left the theatre, retired to his house, and died five days after.

In the Acts (xii. 23) this same story is related with the usual embellishments. The owl is changed into an angel of the Lord, and Herod is made to appear to die on the spot, eaten up with worms !—“ And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory : and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.”

Here we have genuine history to disprove the assertions of these anonymous Gospel writers, and expose the unfair way in which they dealt with facts ; not hesitating, when it answered their own purpose, to convert a simple historical occurrence into a supernatural divine miracle. It is not

on such testimony as this, that we can yield our belief, in contradiction to our own experience of natural events ; and all the miracles detailed in the Acts rest exclusively on such testimony, not one being confirmed by either the Epistles or Gospels.

Descent of the Spirit.—Matthew and Mark relate, that Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, and that he saw the Spirit descending upon himself like a dove.—Luke says that the Spirit descended in a bodily shape, like a dove.—John adds, that this descent of the Spirit had been foretold to John the Baptist.—By the time of Justin, there was also a fire kindled in the Jordan.—(Dial. with Trypho.)

Angel in the Sepulchre.—The progress of exaggeration and invention are also well exposed in the following statement.

“ And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted : ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified : he is risen ; he is not here : behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee : there shall ye see him, as he said unto you. And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre ; for they trembled and were amazed : neither said they any thing to any man ; for they were afraid. (Mark xvi. 5—8.)

Here Mark states that one young man was seen in the sepulchre, Luke says there were two men, and Matthew adds to this an earthquake to embellish the scene. This occurrence was at length converted into the appearance of an angel by Mark, then of two angels by Luke, and finally of Jesus himself by John.

Here the Gospels themselves expose the fictitious character of their own narrative ; and the progress from the credible to the incredible, the natural to the supernatural, is well displayed ; the men being converted into angels, and an earthquake and Jesus himself introduced, to glorify the scene. So anxious was John to exceed them all in the imaginative faculty, as to introduce Jesus himself, although thereby falsifying the statements of all the others.

Raising the Dead.—Here again a natural event is converted into the supernatural.

A certain ruler, Jairus, came to Jesus, saying, " My daughter is even now dead, but come and lay thy hand on her and she shall live." And Jesus suffered no man to follow him, but his three confidential followers, Peter, James, and John ; and when he came into the house and saw the people making a noise, he said, " Why make ye this ado and weep ? *the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth.*" He then turned all the people out and took her by the hand, and the maid arose. (Mark v. 22—42.)

Here we have Jesus' own declaration that the maid was not dead, but sleeping, and who will gainsay his words ? He tells them plainly " not to be alarmed, for the damsel was not dead," which speech is quite inconsistent with the belief on his part that she was really dead ; for if this were the case, why say in so pointed a manner, what was not only incorrect, but threw so much doubt on the miracle ? He accordingly went and roused the maiden out of her trance, and she awoke.—This simple incident is seized on by the Gospel writers, and with some embellishment is converted into a miracle. Alas, how many miracles of a similar kind could not the physicians of all ages record !

Miraculous Draught of Fishes.—"And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left *their* nets, and followed him." (Matt. iv. 18—20.)

Luke embellishes this simple narrative, by adding "a miraculous draught of fishes" (Luke v.), and to this John adds a miraculous fire of coals to broil the fish; and makes the whole take place after the resurrection of Jesus! (John xxi. 9.) Here we again see the natural progress of a story, after many years, from a simple occurrence to a wonderful miracle. The reader will particularly notice the lively imagination of John, in kindling a fire to broil the fish!

Casting out Demons.—Matthew relates, that "when even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils, and he cast out the spirits with his word." (Matt. viii. 16.) This is Matthew's version.—It comes into Mark's hands, and he embellishes it by adding, "and he suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him." (Mark i. 34.) Luke improves on this by adding, "and demons also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God. And he rebuking *them*, suffered them not to speak: for they knew that he was Christ." (Luke iv. 41.)

In these statements the reader will see again the progress of exaggeration, in the additions made in turn by the Gospel writers, although bordering closely on a contradiction, Luke falsifying Mark's statement, who had declared "that the demons' mouths were closed, and they were not suffered to speak," by affirming "that they proclaimed Jesus to be the Messiah."

Now it would appear to us, that so far from preventing these poor devils from speaking, Jesus ought rather to have encouraged them, to proclaim his glory to the multitude,—to shew to the world, that even the very inhabitants of the lower regions opened their mouths to declare his Messiahship. It might, however, be a question, how these demons found out that Jesus was the Messiah, or for what purpose God gave them power to take possession of the bodies of these poor people, and even to occupy the body of Mary Magdalene, out of whom Jesus is reported to have cast seven devils. (Mark xvi. 9.)

It might be curious to ascertain what has become of these demons now, for it would appear that the present inhabitants of the world laugh at such creations, as the figments of ignorance and of a bewildered imagination: and defy the devil and all his works!

Driving out devils.—Again we have an account of Jesus driving the devils out of two men, *that were possessed*, into a “herd of many swine feeding; and the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters.” (Luke viii. 32.)

In this transaction a great injustice is perpetrated against the owners of these animals, in depriving them in this arbitrary manner of their property; and of cruelty against the animals themselves in thus wantonly destroying them.

It is further stated, that the people of the place were so alarmed, that they besought Jesus to depart out of their coast. Nothing could be more natural; for what man or community would not apprehend serious injury from the existence of a person among them, exhibiting his powers by destroying their flocks and herds? But why did they not exact compens-

ation from Jesus for the injury sustained? This is truly a most apocryphal story, and places Jesus in a most unenviable position; and the reader will perceive that herds of swine are here introduced as grazing in a country, where the animal was prohibited and declared to be unclean! The writer of this we pronounce could neither have been a Jew nor an inhabitant of the country.

Curing a lunatic.—(Matt. xvii. 15.) "There came to him a man saying, Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatick, and sore vexed: for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water. And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him." (Mat. xvii. 15, 18.) Now Mark (ix. 25) improves on the story and says—that Jesus "rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee come out of him, and enter no more into him. *And the spirit cried, and rent him sore*, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose."

Here again the reader may observe the progress of embellishment among these veracious Gospel writers; and we need scarcely enter into a refutation of these justly exploded notions of "people being possessed of devils," they are now so universally derided and disbelieved.

The fact is, this miracle was a simple case of Epilepsy, and not of Lunacy, with which the poor boy was afflicted, and of which we see many instances at the present day, under the designation of *Falling Sickness*. The reader will observe that the fit, which had lasted sometime, did not cease *immediately* at Jesus' command, disproving his miraculous power; but continued so violently, that the falling down from exhaustion was the natural termination of the paroxysm.

Here the simple fact that is related of Jesus, that he fell

into the popular error of attributing a disease, which he did not understand, to the possession of evil spirits or devils in the human body, shews that he was not only an uninspired man himself, but that he abounded in all the silly prejudices and notions of his too credulous countrymen!

It is truly surprising, that there ever should have been a question, among persons of common sense, about the reality of these "possessions;" and when we consider the vulgar notions about evil spirits and devils, we cannot account for their prevalence by any other means than the overwhelming influence of priest-craft acting on the ignorance and credulity of mankind, who were led to attribute all unmanageable diseases to the actual residence of devils in the human body. "We do not deny (says Athenagoras, of the apostolic age) that in different places, cities, and countries, there are some extraordinary works performed in the name of idols." (See Middleton's *Miraculous Powers*.)

It is not a century ago that the laying of ghosts, driving out spirits, and adjuring witches, continued a most profitable employment to the clergy of all denominations, founded on a belief in these Gospel miracles. Lunatics, hypochondriacal and epileptic people, and women labouring under hysterical and other nervous affections, were declared by the priests to be the victims of evil spirits, malignant demons, and Divine wrath. This was called the *Sacred Disease*, and only to be cured through the instrumentality of the priests.*

* It is curious, that the belief of the possession of devils, in the human body, is as prevalent in the East at the present day as in the time of the Apostles; and the Brahmins are believed to possess the power of expelling them by incantations and prayer. The surgeon of a Sepoy corps, in illustration, related to me, that one day his native assistant

This belief was strengthened in the minds of the people by the saying of Jesus, who is made to declare to his disciples, on his failure in curing them, that these devils were only to be cast out by fasting and prayer.

"Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." (Matt. xvii. 21.)

Miracle of loaves and fishes.—Matthew and Mark relate that Jesus fed 5000 men with five loaves and two fishes; and after they were all filled, they collected the fragments, amounting to *twelve baskets full*. They also relate a second story of the feeding of 4000 men with seven loaves and a few fishes; and *seven baskets of fragments* were taken up when the men were satisfied. They do not state the size of the loaves and fishes, or where the nineteen baskets of fragments came from! Neither Luke nor John take any notice of this latter miracle. (Matt. xiv. 15.)

reported, that a Sepoy was seriously ill, possessed of the devil, "*Sheitan ooske budun pukra*." On visiting him, the surgeon found him seated on the ground, foaming, raving, and talking incoherently with great excitement. He was surrounded by a crowd of Brahmins and others, repeating their *Munturs* or incantations to drive out the evil spirit. They begged the surgeon not to interfere at present, promising to hand the patient over to him if they failed. In a short time, the native assistant came to say, that they agreed to leave the case in his hands. The Dr accordingly went to the man, called for his Cutora or drinking cup filled with water, and passing his hand over it, sprinkled a pinch of tartar emetic into the cup, repeating three times the name of the Hindoo god, *Ram*. The man drank off the whole at a draught, the surgeon commanding the devil to come out of him. Presently his raving and violence ceased, he became quiet, and silent, and sick, and copious vomiting ensued; the Brahmins declaring that each time a devil was expelled. Shortly after the man quietly gathered himself up, quite restored, and returned to his friends,—*And the multitude went away amazed and wondering!*

The reader will not fail to remark here, that in the second miracle, the disciples have not the slightest remembrance of the first miraculous feeding; but most innocently ask of Jesus, "Whence should we have bread to satisfy so great a multitude?" and Jesus in his reply shews the same unconsciousness of any similar previous occurrence. (Matt. xv. 33.)

But even laying aside these suspicious circumstances of the second feeding, and the disciples' utter forgetfulness of the first miracle, would any evidence in the world entitle this story to our serious consideration? Surely human credence has its limits, as well as human reason! We ourselves are not deficient in our powers of deglutition, and can swallow, we believe, as much as our neighbours; but we honestly confess our inability to swallow the five loaves and two fishes, especially the fragments that remained!

Shortly after the disciples had witnessed these two miraculous supplies of food, they appear quite distressed in having forgotten to bring with them a supply of bread. (Matt. xvi.) And, strange to say, not one of them thinks of applying to Jesus for the remedy; nor does one of them seem cognizant of the previous miraculous supply with which he had just fed the multitude.

John's relation confirms this; for immediately after this reputed miracle, Jesus says to the people, "Ye seek me not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled." (John vi. 26.) And yet immediately after, the people, quite ignorant and unaware of there being any miracle in his previous feeding, naturally ask him, when he urges them to believe,—

"What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? what dost thou work? Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as

it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat." (John vi. 30, 31.)

Thus it seems the people had forgotten the sign of the miraculous feeding, "his giving them bread in the desert," as entirely and completely as the disciples. Jesus in his answer totally evades the question put to him, and instead of appealing to his previous miracle, merely tells them that he himself is the true bread from heaven. Now can any one imagine, if the miraculous feeding had really taken place, that the people would have made such an absurd demand, to require a sign, as the condition of believing, after a sign had just been given; or that Jesus would have put them off with such a mystifying and evasive answer?

But these discrepancies unfold the fictitious character of these reputed miracles; and the narrators, from their want of harmony and keeping in their statements, betray their untruthfulness.—This is not the testimony we should expect from inspired writings, as the mark and seal of true godliness.

The blind man of Jericho.—The blind man prays to Jesus that he might receive his sight. "And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. *And immediately he received his sight.*" (Mark x.) Now John contradicts this statement, and says, he did not immediately receive his sight; for that Jesus anointed his eyes with clay, and told him to go and bathe in the pool of Siloam. (John ix.)

Blind man of Bethsaida.—(Mark viii. 22.) In this miracle, Jesus is stated to have tried *twice* before he appears to have succeeded *once*, which would be altogether inconsistent with divine power.

Nothing is more obvious (says the Rev. Robert Taylor) than that persons diseased in body must labour under a corresponding weakness of mind. There is no delusion of such obvious practicability on a weak mind, in a diseased body, as that which holds out hopes of cure beyond the promise of nature. A miracle of healing is therefore of all miracles, in its nature, most suspicious and least capable of evidence; and accordingly still continues to be practised, on the credulous, by the Catholic clergy, even at the present day.

The barren fig-tree.—Jesus comes to a fig-tree, to eat of the fruit, and finding nothing on it but leaves, *it not being the season for fruit*, he is made to display a capricious and fretful spirit, by cursing the tree for not bearing fruit out of season. Matthew states (xxi. 19) that the tree withered away immediately; but Mark gives us another version of the story (Mark xi. 13), and says that no change took place at the time, but that in passing that way the following day they found the fig-tree dried up. Here Mark destroys the principal feature of Matthew's version, 'as the appearance on the following day might have been produced from natural causes.

Transfiguration—Metamorphose of Jesus is the original expression.—Matthew (xvii.) relates, that Jesus ascends a mountain with his three confidential disciples, who, as Luke states, "were heavy with sleep;" that his countenance and clothes became illuminated; that two old men (declared to be Moses and Elias) appear talking with him; and lastly, as the winding up of the scene, a voice, out of a cloud, proclaimed him to be Jesus the Son of God. "And Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the *vision* to no man, until the Son of Man be risen again."

the bridegroom, and saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and *when men have well drunk*, then that which is worse: *but thou hast kept the good wine until now.*"—John ii. 9, 10.

We would here ask, What object could there be in Jesus producing this enormous quantity of wine (about 130 gallons), "after the company had well drunk?" To manifest forth his glory?—this was certainly a strange time and place to chose. Was this a fitting opportunity to manifest forth his glory, after the men had well drunk?

What an opportunity was here lost for Jesus to have exhorted the company to moderation, and to have impressed on their minds the importance of temperance in all things. It would have been of more value to his hearers, and have redounded more to his own credit, than all these unmeaning and silly miracles. For as far as relates to the company, the whole must have been a failure; and we learn elsewhere after all, that the kinsmen of Jesus, who were there, did not believe on him! (John vii. 5.)

Neander, in his *Life of Christ*, is evidently ashamed of this miracle, and tries to relieve the text by allegorizing! And the early Fathers of the Church, in their anxiety to prop up this fiction, solemnly assert, that in their days several fountains and rivers (in proof of this miracle) were annually turned into wine. "I myself," says Epiphanius, A. D. 368, "have drunk out of the fountain of Cibra, and my brethren out of another at Gerasa; and many testify the same thing of the river Nile, proving the truth of this miracle." (Adv. Hær. l. 2. c. 30.)*

* In the first ages of Christianity, the early Christians looked on it to be a praise-worthy act to invent and countenance the most palpa-

Purging the Temple.—(John ii.) Jesus is here described as proceeding to the temple, and violently driving out of the court of the temple, the changers of money, &c.

“And the Jews’ passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and found in the Temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: and when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers’ money, and overthrew the tables.”

It is inconceivable how any man, in his sober senses, should enter into the courts of the temple, and drive out the people that were always collected there, for the purpose of supplying the sacrifices with sheep, and oxen, and doves; or that they should for a moment have submitted to such an outrage.

These people, according to custom, had the sanction of the high priest to bring cattle for sale to the outer courts of the temple for the sacrifices, and doves for the offerings of the poorer classes, and money to exchange for the foreign coin which those from distant parts brought with them; for every Jew had to pay a half shekel for the service of the tabernacle. So that there was nothing unusual in the buyers and sellers being congregated there.

Besides, if any one had dared to commit such an outrage within the precincts of the Sacred Temple, interfering with the arrangements of the high priest, by flogging the men, overturning the money stands, and driving away the cattle,

ble falsehoods in support of the Scriptures. But for farther evidence of the credulity and want of veracity of the early Fathers of the Church, we refer the reader to Middleton’s “Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers of the Early Church.”

he would have been seized as a mad man, and summarily punished, if not stoned to death.

Had such an attempt been really made by Jesus, and he had escaped with his life, it would have formed the principal charge against him on his trial; whereas this act, that would have been considered one of desecration, is not even noticed in any of the accusations against him, thereby confirming our opinion, that it is one of the many fictions added to the meagre outlines of this man's obscure life, for the purpose of giving him a name and enabling the compiler to introduce a supposed prophecy of Malachi, iii. 1, and applying it to him.

The only way in which the Gospel advocates endeavour to reconcile this story to the reader, is by declaring it to be all a miracle!—See Blount's Lect. on Christianity. The account is altogether apochryphal, and never could have taken place as represented; except in a fit of "divine furor," altogether at variance with the passive and timid character given to Jesus.

Raising of Lazarus.—John is the only one who mentions this miracle; neither Matthew, Mark, nor Luke appear to have had any knowledge of the affair. John did not write his Gospel till some sixty years after the others, and he is so given to indulge in revelations and the invention of his imaginations, that little dependence can be placed on him or his Gospel.

He says, the people bare record to the raising of Lazarus; where then is their record? Let it be produced, for these vague remarks cannot be received as evidence. None of the other Evangelists, who wrote so much nearer the time of Jesus, mention one word of it, and neither the Acts nor

Epistles allude to it; although had there been any truth in it, it would have been eagerly seized on by Paul, as affording one of the best illustrations of the resurrection of the dead, his favourite topic.

Matthew and Mark seem quite ignorant of that which John says attracted the Jews, namely, the presence of the revived Lazarus at the supper at Bethany; although they both give an account of the supper. Besides, this episode of Lazarus, if it did occur, would seem to be forced on the attention of the first three Evangelists, when they relate the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, and the conduct of the multitude; for John says, that the people then bare record of his having raised Lazarus. But here the three first Gospels make not the slightest allusion to it.

It is remarkable that the raising of Jairus's daughter, which was said to have been performed in secret, is related by three Evangelists; whilst the other two resurrections, which were said to be public, rest each on the testimony of one. The omission of an incident by one writer does not always invalidate the narration of it by another; but considering the extreme importance of the last two miracles to the Christian cause, as well as their impressive nature, it does seem an insuperable objection, that three out of the four Gospels should have neglected or forgotten to mention them altogether.

Now it is certain that if such an act, as that of raising a dead man to life, had really been performed in the above instances, it must have made a great noise in the world, and been celebrated by all the historians of the times. But even in that very apostolic age, when an eminent heathen, Antiochus, challenged his friend Theophilus, bishop of Antioch, a convert and champion of the Gospel, "to shew him but

one person who had been raised from the dead, and he would become a Christian," Theophilus acknowledged, that he could not respond to it.—(See Middleton's Inquiry, p. 73.)

Centurion's servant or child (Matt. viii. 5—8).—"And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed."

It seems Jesus was so pleased at this compliment to his healing powers and acknowledgment of his divine mission, that the story concludes thus:

"And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the self-same hour."

Luke ends his version of the story thus:

"And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick." (vii. 10.)

It comes into John's hands, and he concludes thus:

"And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth. Then inquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. So the father knew that *it was* at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house." (John iv. 51—53.)

Here the vague assertion of Matthew, which gives no particulars, is amply filled up in the later narratives; nor

can we understand how the details of the story should become better known the further we recede from the original source. In John's account some sixty years after we find a circumstantially related miracle; if we go back some forty years to Luke's account, the miraculous portion is reduced to a few words; and if we approach still nearer to its source in Matthew, the addition has the appearance of being as much a matter of inference as of knowledge, and seems added to complete the story,

The Voice from Heaven.—John, who, it is conjectured by many, wrote some time in the second century, and indulged freely his imagination, relates that Jesus uttered a prayer, ending thus:

“‘Father, glorify thy name.’—Then came there a voice from heaven, *saying*, I have both glorified *it*, and will glorify *it* again. The people therefore, that stood by, and heard *it*, said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to him.”

Here the people that stood by said it thundered, others that it was the voice of an angel; and John completes the miracle by translating the voice of the thunder into the Greek language, making it a response to Jesus' prayer! Taking into consideration John's creative propensity, it is more reasonable to conjecture that the whole was merely an embellishment to glorify Jesus.

Stilling the Tempest.—“And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him. And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep. And his disciples came to *him*, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.” (Matt. viii. 23—26.)

The reader will be rather surprised to hear, that this *sea* was the lake of Tiberias, an inland lake or basin, as Buckingham the eastern traveller terms it; the *ship* one of the fishing boats; the *great tempest* a sudden gust of wind; and the *great calm* its subsidence!

In describing the lake of Tiberias, Buckingham says: "Its local features render it occasionally subject to whirlwinds, squalls, and sudden gusts, from the hollow of the mountains, which, as in any other similar basins, are of short duration; and the most furious gust is succeeded by a perfect calm."

Walking on the Sea (Matt. xiv.)—"And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone. But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves; for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear."

Here it seems that the disciples had got into a boat to cross the lake, and Jesus had retired to the mountain to pray, and during the night in order to reach the boat he had to wade through the shallow water. The credulous followers of Jesus looked on this apparition, in the obscure gloom of the night, to be a spirit walking on the surface of the waters.

Malchus's ear.—Matthew, Mark, and John relate that one of the disciples cut off the high priest's servant's ear, on the apprehension of Jesus. So it seems Jesus' followers carried swords! Luke alone adds, "And he (Jesus) touched his ear, (after it was cut off!) and healed him" (Luke xii. 51). The silence of those, both before and after Luke, concerning such an important result; of John supposed to have been an eye-witness, and Mark, who was acquainted with Peter,

an eye-witness, and especially the omission of this fact by John after it had been once promulgated,—all is nearly equivalent to a denial of the miracle.

The reader will perceive how easy it is, even at this remote period, by a little careful analysis, to expose the nakedness of these reputed miracles, which had no effect, it seems, on many of those who lived in the very time of Jesus, and were most capable of appreciating them. "For neither did his brethren believe in him." (John vii. 5.) "Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not." (Matt. xi.) "For they considered not the miracle of the loaves, for their hearts were hardened," that is, they would not believe in the miracles! (Mark vi. 52.) "And he could there do no mighty works, save that he laid his hands on a few sick and healed them; and he marvelled because of their unbelief." (Mark vi. 5.)

We do not find that any of those on whom miracles were said to have been performed came forward themselves, in the subsequent part of the history, to attest their truth; nor, judging from the Acts or Epistles, do they play any conspicuous part afterwards in the affairs of the Church.

Jesus never seemed to have a high opinion of his own powers as a miracle-worker; for he admits that there was more difficulty in the performance of some miracles than of others (Matt. xvii. 21), and in his failures pleaded a want of faith or belief in the applicant; and when he was asked to do a public miracle in attestation of his divine mission, he not only refused, but did not even appeal to his previous miracles. (Matt. xxi.)

A story is related of Jesus rebuking a devil, who kept his hold so obstinately of a boy, that his disciples, with all the miraculous powers with which he had invested them, were

unable to cast him out. And Jesus is represented as excusing himself for the failure by saying, "Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." (Matt. xvii.) "Now we know," says Michaelis, "that the Jews ascribed almost all diseases to the influence of evil spirits. To cure a disease was, according to their notion, to expel an evil spirit. This they pretended to do by charms and herbs; and we have seen the extraordinary efficacy and virtue the Essenian Jews ascribed to *fasting and prayer*."

Again, on his visit to Jerusalem, when, in the temple, he was pressed for a sign of his claims to the Messiahship, he told them to destroy the temple and he would build it up again in three days. But the people looked on this as an idle boast, and replied that if it took forty years to build the temple, it was not likely that he could rebuild it in three days. John, long after Jesus' death, tried to explain away this vain boast by allegorizing, saying, that Jesus spake of the temple of his own body!

Jesus in another place puts his own miracles of healing and casting out devils on a level with those of the Jewish exorcists, and at the same time acknowledging their success in working miracles, and making no distinction between them and his own. "And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges." (Matt. xii. 27.) And John says also, "Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us" (Mark ix. 38), clearly shewing, that the practice was a very common one in those credulous times, especially among the Essenian Jews, and no more questioned than the miracles of Jesus himself.

The reader will here observe, that there is not one of these miracles and mighty works brought forward in an authenticated form; neither do the patients, nor any of the mul-

titude who witnessed them, come forward before the constituted or competent authorities to attest their truth; nor do any of the historians of those times mention one word about them,—so that we have, in reality, no testimony to support them.

The “earthquakes, and darkness, and convulsions of nature; the rending of rocks, the opening of graves, and the resurrection of many bodies of saints,” leave not the slightest vestiges in history. None of the miracles produce any effect upon indisputable historical facts; but events go on in their natural course without the slightest symptoms of supernatural disturbance, and in despite of the legions of angels that were vainly declared to be at Jesus’ disposal. They have therefore been handed down to us under the most doubtful and suspicious circumstances in these four anonymous Gospel narratives, which we have shewn are worthless, from the many discrepancies and contradictions in which they abound. If then these miracles were intended as the marks and seal of true godliness, they would most assuredly have been more carefully preserved, better authenticated, and have been surrounded with such a halo of evidence and truth, as would have defied all cavil and all criticism.

The improved science of modern times shews, that disease and premature death are natural penalties annexed to the abuse of man’s powers. To remove these penalties by supernatural means, if it were possible, would be a cancelling of the laws of nature; and if the different parts of the divine plan be considered to harmonize with each other, surely the credentials of the Deity would not consist in the infringement of his own immutable laws.

Most of the miracles attributed to Jesus are of the same kind, viz. the removal of natural penalties. Now, instead of these stories of doubtful verification, if Jesus had explained

to the multitude the causes of blindness, fever, and palsy, and warned them to abstain from those causes which lead to such evils; if, instead of mystifying their weak minds by encouraging such absurdities, he had opened their eyes to the true cause of disease and explained its prevention and cure, this would have shewn him superior to other men, and been evidence to the end of time.

The possession of such knowledge by a person in the age, country, and circumstances of Jesus, would have been more miraculous than all these silly trifling tales, which no unprejudiced person can peruse, without regretting such a misapplication of time and talent.

CHAPTER XX.

THE PROPHECIES.

MAN's aspirations are always towards the future, and he eagerly desires and seeks to discover the probable result of his undertakings. The prediction of future events has therefore ever been a fertile source of profit and power, which the crafty have exercised over the credulous. It was therefore always a mighty engine in the hands of the priests, and the responses were delivered in such obscure language, that whichever way the event terminated, the credit of the prophet was safe.

Divine inspiration, or the gift of prophecy, so far from being a guarantee that truth would be spoken under its immediate influence, is, in scripture itself, declared to be no criterion whereby we may conclude that what is handed down to us as *prophetic* is always *true*. For God is made to declare, "If the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that prophet." (Ezek. xiv. 9.)

Again, when it is intended that King Ahab should be urged to his own destruction, God is represented as causing his prophets to prophesy falsely, as the means of his overthrow. "Now therefore the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all" his prophets. (1 Kings. xxii. 23.)

So doubtful and so deceitful is this gift of prophecy, that God is made, by the mouth of the Apostle Paul, to declare, "For this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that

they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned." (2 Thess. ii. 11.) What guarantee have we, then, that this may not be the case in regard to these prophecies, and that a lying spirit has not been put into the mouths of the prophets, and that we may not be labouring under strong delusions?

The Old Testament writings are supposed to make many allusions to future events, and especially to the coming of a mighty prince or Messiah of the house of David, who would sit on the throne of David, and reign over Israel. Every passage which, in the most remote degree, was thought to bear any allusion to the life or acts attributed to Jesus, has been eagerly seized on by the Gospel writers, assimilated to this person, and exhibited as proof of his Messiahship.

Even many of Jesus' reputed acts have been so related, as to bear some faint resemblance to obscure passages of the Old Testament. And frequently, trusting to the ignorance of their hearers, and their inability to examine for themselves, the writers have even ventured to quote supposed passages which had no real existence.

The opinion, that the prophecies of the Old Testament contained a secondary or mystical meaning, is unsupported by evidence. The writers themselves do not pretend to have more than one meaning, which in most cases is very intelligible, and relates to events of *or near* the times in which they wrote. But to suppose that they were making allusions to events that had no existence till 500 years after, or that the Almighty Creator would manifest himself to the world in this obscure and doubtful manner, is the extreme of improbability.

The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah is often quoted as referring to the Messiah, but it is considered by all impartial readers, to be a poetical exhortation to the Jewish people

(under the name of Jacob or Israel), describing their sufferings during the captivity; and which sufferings, Isaiah announces, will be accepted by Jehovah, as a propitiation or atonement for their sins. The whole is evidently intended as an encouragement to the broken and wounded spirit of that wretched people on their return from captivity, and to inspire them with zeal and courage to restore their nation to its former glory. They are therefore appealed to under the venerated names of "Jacob and Israel." This is the view taken by the most learned Jews, who state, "that in Isaiah, Jacob or Israel does not mean *one man*, but *one people*, who are described, as smitten of God, and dispersed among the Gentiles for their conversion."

Origen, who lived in the 4th century, tells us "that the Jews of his time were accustomed to deride the Christians, as not understanding the sense of scripture on which they pretended to build so much." (*Orig. C. Cels.*) Now the early Christians, in their eagerness to convert this chapter to their own purpose, have not hesitated to tear it rudely from its context, and so explain it as to stultify the writer, Isaiah, who is made to introduce abruptly a new subject (Jesus as the Christ) and to return again to his usual one (Jacob or Israel) without any explanation!—To such shifts have they had to resort to prop up their new religion.

In the Gospel narratives, some of the incidents appear to agree with detached sentences in the Jewish scriptures. This confirmed the belief of the disciples that Jesus had claims to the Messiahship; and they were able, by straining the facts a little one way, and the meaning of scripture another, so to find in almost every page some fresh coincidence. Words and sentences, falling through lapse of time into dry forms, were vivified by the discovery of some supposed mysterious connexion with present things. Coinci-

dences the most doubtful were magnified into fulfilled prophecies; and imagination found abundance of connexion, which common sense alone could never have discovered. (See Hennell's Christianity).

From the confidence and frequency with which Jesus and the apostles directed inquirers to "search the scriptures," for evidence of his Messiahship, it seems clear, that they trusted to the evidence of prophecy and its fulfilment chiefly, as the strongest arguments in its favour. The comparative infrequency of their appeal to miracles shews that they were less relied on.

We now proceed to try Jesus' pretensions by the above test, and examine some of those passages that have been chiefly relied on and quoted by the Gospel writers.

Jesus' supposed divine origin is founded on the following passage from Isaiah,—

"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good. For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings." (Isa. vii. 14—16.)

Here Isaiah tells us plainly, that a child would be born, not by one who was a mother, but by a virgin, who never bore a child, i. e. it would be a first-born child; for the Hebrew word, translated virgin, means a marriageable young woman, and not an "immaculate virgin." The confirmation of this is made in the next chapter, from which it is obvious that the writer is speaking of his own wife and child.

"And I went unto the prophetess; and she conceived, and bare a son. Then said the Lord to me, Call his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz. For before the child shall have knowledge to cry, My father, and my mother, the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be taken away before the king of Assyria." (viii. 3, 4.)

Here then is the prophecy in the one chapter, and its completion or fulfilment in the next, and almost in the same words!

It being the custom among both the Greeks and Romans to deify their great men, the early Christians, in their anxiety to exalt the reputed author of their religion, and to relieve themselves from the opprobrium of "worshipping a dead man and crucified Jew," eagerly seized on this passage, in the first chapter, without observing its fulfilment in the next,—declaring that it referred specially to Jesus; and as *Emmanuel* signifies "God with us," he must be divinely begotten! that his mother Mary was consequently a pure virgin *intact*, that she was impregnated by the Holy Ghost, and that it was here foretold, 500 years before, by the prophet Isaiah!

Previously to this, the Gospel writers, to support Jesus' pretensions as a lineal descendant of David, had drawn out an elaborate genealogy of his descent from David; but by thus declaring him to be begotten of God, they destroyed the only fair title he had to the Messiahship. So from one difficulty they only involved themselves in a greater; and the Christian religion has ever since remained on the horns of a dilemma; and which has been a bone of contention to the different conflicting sects of Christians now for nearly 2000 years!

As a further and conclusive proof that Isaiah could not have referred, in this or any other part of his work, to a Messiah or Saviour, or to the Son of God or offspring of the Deity, we refer the reader to his celebrated 43rd chapter, where it expressly states that besides the Lord God there is no Saviour.

"I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, *even* I, am the Lord, and BESIDE ME there is NO SAVIOUR." (Isa. xliii. 3, 10, 11.)

From the following passage it may be seen, that even at the end of the first century, when John wrote, the people objected to Jesus being the Messiah, because he was not of the seed of David; and they even questioned his being born at Bethlehem, David's birthplace.

"Some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was? So there was a division among the people because of him." (John vii. 41—43.)

Nor does John venture to contradict either of these objections; yet if he knew that Jesus was really born at Bethlehem, he could scarcely have avoided mentioning it here.

The following passage has been brought forward, as referring to the person of Jesus and his divinity. Grotius, the learned commentator, says, that instead of "Counsellor, the Mighty God," we should read "consulter of the Mighty God."

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of *his* government and peace *there shall be* no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever." (Isaiah ix. 6, 7.)

Here Isaiah tells the people, that unto them a child is born, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, &c. Josiah, the king, was only eight years old when he began to reign, a pious and excellent king, and to him this eulogium is evidently applied. The passage refers to the throne of David, on which Jesus never sat, and to a peaceful settlement of the government and kingdom of Israel, whereas, in the time of Jesus, it was in the hands of the Romans, and ultimately got into utter confusion!

"This is *he*, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger *before thy face*, which shall prepare *thy* way before *thee*." (Luke vii. 27.) This is one of those passages that produced the popular idea of a Messiah in the Jewish mind. But here the reader will observe the dishonest advantage taken by Mark and Luke, so that, in order to accommodate the passage to Jesus, they have not hesitated to alter the original.

"Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me." (Malachi iii. 1.)

Here "before me," referring to the Lord of Hosts, is altered into "before thee," or Jesus; and to strengthen the inference, the passage is interpolated with the additions of *thy way*, and *before thy face*!

What can we think of such moral dishonesty! Is this like the mark and seal of true godliness? Lightfoot in his commentary on Mark says, "This quotation from Malachi agrees neither with the original Hebrew nor the Greek version; the Septuagint has it, 'he shall prepare the way before *my* face.'"

"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." (Malachi iv. 5.)

Malachi here foretells the coming of the messenger of the Lord, and a day of vengeance on the wicked, evidently referring to the last judgment. Now Elijah never has appeared; and when John the Baptist appeared at Jordan, Jesus declared that "he was Elijah," (Matt. xi. 14,) but when the question was put to John, he positively denied it.

"And he was there (in Egypt) until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, 'Out of Egypt I have called my son.'" (Matt. ii. 15.)

The passage in Hosea xi. 1, from which the above misquotation is made, is thus : "When Israel *was* a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt," evidently referring to the children of Israel being called out of Egypt, as related in Exodus.

"And he cast out the spirits with *his* word, and healed all that were sick : that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare *our* sicknesses." (Matt. viii. 17.)

Here Matthew has again quoted most incorrectly, and given quite a different sense to that of Isaiah liii. 4. For Isaiah speaks of the sorrows undergone by the person himself ; Matthew, on the contrary, of the infirmities and sickness which Jesus removed from others !

"And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth : that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene." (Matt. ii. 23.)

There is no such prophecy as this in the Bible !

"He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool?" (Matt. xxii. 43, 44.)

So much for Hebrew quotations, and the facility with which they can be misapplied. Now the true meaning of this fragment from Psalm cx. seems to be a complimentary address to some person, to whom it gives the common title of "my Lord." (See Kings xviii. 7, 13 ; Judges vi. 13.) It speaks of his warlike greatness, but has nothing applicable to Jesus, and has been put most injudiciously into his mouth.

"Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value ; and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me." (Matt. xxvii. 9.)

The coincidence of the thirty pieces of silver and the potter's field, would be remarkable, were there not strong reason to suspect Matthew of having accommodated his narrative to this verse; for, strange to say, none of the other Gospels mention one word of the thirty pieces of silver or of the potter's field! Mark and Luke merely say that Judas bargained for money, and in the Acts i. 18, it is said, that Judas, not the priests, bought "a field" with the money.—Indeed the whole account of the betrayal of Judas bears a fictitious character, abounding in contradictions, which however will be shown in the chapter on "Judas the Betrayer."

"Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph." (John i. 45.)

Now the only passage in the Pentateuch bearing on the above quotation is Deut. xviii. 15, "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken." Here Moses evidently referred to those leaders that would succeed him. Grotius, Stillingfleet, and others, understood Moses here to refer to a succession of prophets, like himself, who, we are told, formed the legal and authorised medium of communication with Jehovah,—but assuredly not to Jesus.

Here John's Gospel, written at the end of the first century, gives Jesus (in the above passage) his true appellation "the Son of Joseph," without any reference to his miraculous birth or divine parentage!

"But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah, *though* thou be little among the thousands of Judah, *yet* out of thee shall he come forth unto me *that* is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth *have been* from of old, from everlasting." (Micah v. 2.)

This is another of those passages from Micah, that misled the Jewish people into the delusive hope, that a mighty prince shall arise and restore the kingdom of Israel. This was eagerly seized on by Matthew, and applied to Jesus, and, for consistency sake, his birth-place was fixed at Bethlehem. But the description does not agree with Jesus, who never ruled over Israel; nor is there any proof that he was born at Bethlehem.

At the crucifixion, Mark (xv.) says, "They gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh;" Matthew says it was "vinegar mingled with gall," purposely to accommodate it to Psalm lxix. 21: "They gave me also gall for my meat, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." Here the perversion of facts, in order to fit them to the prophecies, indicates historical dishonesty.

"And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots." (Matt. xxvii. 35.)

It was the custom then, as now, that the condemned person's clothes should become the property of the executioners, so that there was nothing prophetic or extraordinary in parting the garments or casting lots for his vesture. But it shews the eagerness of the Gospel writers, to seize on every text that would, in the most remote degree, apply in any way to the life of Jesus.

"But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: for these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken." (John xix. 33. 36.)

Here the reader will smile when he hears, that the prophecy alluded to is the direction given by Moses, in Exodus, about the cooking and eating of the Passover!

"And the Lord said unto Moses and Aaron, This is the ordinance of the passover: In one house shall it be eaten; thou shalt not carry forth ought of the flesh abroad out of the house; neither shall ye break a bone thereof."—(Exod. xii. 43, 46.)

Need we proceed further, in our examination of these doubtful, and obscure, and often frivolous quotations from the Jewish scriptures, which the Gospel writers have endeavoured to apply to a person who did not come into existence till some 500 years after; and which, even at the present day, still continue to distract and perplex men's minds as to their true meaning and import?

The reader must perceive the manifest absurdity of supposing that the above-quoted passages could have any reference to Jesus or his times. To us it seems impossible that any one, who impartially examines the context, can seriously represent them as prophecies fulfilled by Jesus! The probability is, that the Gospel writers never calculated on this kind of searching inquiry, but thought that their writings would be received by people, in after ages, with the same humble submissiveness as they were by their credulous followers.

CHAPTER XXI.

JESUS IN HIS PROPHETIC CHARACTER.

As it was considered, that the expected Messiah would be endowed with a prophetic spirit, Jesus evidently aimed at this object, namely, to be looked on by his followers as a prophet himself. He is therefore frequently introduced to us as speaking in the prophetic style. But the specimens, handed down to us by the Gospel writers, are rather unfavourable to his pretensions,—we will, however, proceed to lay them before the reader.

“And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what *shall* be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?”

Here the disciples are represented as putting a most unlikely question to Jesus, and one which could have no meaning at the time, *for Jesus was already with them*; and, from their subsequent conduct and language, the reader will see, that the disciples *then* expected—not the end of the world—but the restoration of the throne of Israel; and that Jesus would, *during his actual stay on earth*, redeem Israel. It was only after his unexpected death that the disciples adopted the novel idea of his second coming. Nor was it until about the time the first Gospel was written that the early Christians had become familiar with these new views, and that the connexion between the coming of the Son of Man, the fall of Jerusalem, and the end of the world, could have been under-

stood. The conclusion is therefore forced on us, that the Gospel writer has put into the mouth of the disciples a question, which was no doubt most interesting to, and often asked by the 'Christians of his own time, but never could have been uttered by the disciples before Jesus' unexpected death.

Jesus, in his reply, after enumerating wars and rumours of wars, and false Christs, and famines, and persecutions,—thus proceeds:

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, *even at the doors*. Verily I say unto you, *This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.*" (Matt. xxiv. 29—34.)

Now this prediction never has been fulfilled; for these things *did not happen*, and many generations have since passed away! Here Jesus announces, that "shortly after that calamity" (the expected destruction of Jerusalem), and within the term of that generation, all these things would be fulfilled; he would make his advent in clouds of glory, and terminate the existing dispensation. This promise never has been accomplished! Eighteen hundred years have now passed away, in the vain hope and expectation of his followers that this promise would be fulfilled.

"No promise (says Reimarus) throughout the whole Scriptures is, on the one hand, more definitively expressed,

and, on the other, has turned out more egregiously false than this prophecy, which yet forms one of the main props of Christianity."

That the immediate fulfilment of this prophecy was expected to take place during the lives of those present, is evident, for in the first ages of Christianity, when the promised return of Jesus was delayed longer than had been anticipated by his followers, there arose among them (according to Peter) "scoffers, saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of the creation." (2 Pet. iii. 3, 4.) And Peter in his reply resorts to the preposterous subterfuge, "that in the eyes of God one day is equal to a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." And Paul, in referring to the non-fulfilment of this promise, shelters himself in obscure phrases. (2 Thess. ii.)

From all this it would appear that, in the early period, this prophecy was often appealed to by the disciples; and the frequent inquiries of the early converts, and their disappointment at its non-fulfilment, must have tested their faith and patience no little; more especially when they saw year after year passing away, and no appearance of the Messiah to redeem his pledge.

John, whose Gospel did not appear till the end of the first century, finding that this prophecy and promise continued unfulfilled, very wisely takes no notice of it whatever.

"Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." (Matt. xvi. 28.)

Here again the above prediction of Jesus never has been fulfilled, for all that generation has passed away, and hundreds of generations have succeeded; and the Son of Man,

has never yet come to his kingdom! What conclusion should we draw from this?—need we pause for a reply?

“Jesus answered and said, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig-tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these.” (John i. 50.) “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.” (i. 51.)

Although Jesus no doubt believed, that this miracle would have been wrought in his favour, yet, alas! the only thing that Nathanael ever witnessed, was Jesus being conveyed as a malefactor to be publicly executed, and ascending and descending from the cross amidst the scoffings of the people.

“Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.” (Matt. xvii. 20.) “Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this *which is done* to the fig-tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.” (Matt. xxi. 22.)

How many sincere and true believers have seen the fallacy of this promise! How many, with faith the most pure and abounding, and prayer the most ardent and sincere, have seen the utter inefficacy of both faith and prayer in the accomplishment of their wishes, even in the removal of small evils; and as to the removal of mountains, either the above is a vain boast, or no man has ever had faith or belief as a grain of mustard seed.

Jesus is reported to have more than once predicted his own sufferings and death. Matthew relates, that certain scribes and Pharisees asked for a sign, that is, that Jesus would, as evidence of his divine mission, perform a miracle. But he declined the challenge *as usual*, and abusively termed

them "an evil and adulterous generation," adding, "there shall no sign be given but the sign of the prophet Jonah,"—

"For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly : so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

Now Jesus never was in the heart of the earth ; and after his crucifixion lay only *one day and two nights* in the chamber or sepulchre, before he disappeared. An inspired writer could not have made such a mistake ; but we suspect that Matthew, in his eagerness to exhibit Jonah as a good type of Jesus, did not hesitate to apply this passage without troubling himself about the correctness of the simile.

Mark, probably perceiving the inaccuracy, has omitted the allusion to Jonah altogether. Luke has preserved it, but altered the text so as to avoid the awkward inconsistency of Matthew's version, and thus expresses it :

"For as Jonas was a sign to the Ninevites, so also shall the Son of man be to this generation." (Luke xi. 30.)

Here again is a sad want of agreement in the inspired writings ! Now which of these accounts is true ? The one writer shews Jesus to be a false prophet ; the other alters the passage, so as to relieve Jesus from his error : and the third, as the wisest course, omits the allusion to Jonah altogether !—These surely are not the marks or seals of inspiration.

Jesus, according to Luke xxiv., expounds to his disciples "all the passages of Scripture relating to himself, beginning at Moses and all the Prophets," and "then he opened their understandings, that they might understand the Scriptures." Now we greatly wish, that Luke had extended to us the details of this exposition, and opened our understandings also ; but, alas ! he limits himself to the mere assertion, and does not give us a single passage as having been interpreted by

Jesus regarding himself or his resurrection! The sentence concludes thus:

"And he said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day."

Now there is no passage in the Old Testament which seems at all to point out Christ's death or resurrection on the third day. Indeed, the Jews never expected that the Messiah was to rise from the dead, but that his posterity would reign after his death. "*Messiam ex morte in vitam rediturum esse Judæi nunquam expectarunt. Morietur autem Messias, regnabuntque post ipsum filius et nepotes.*" (Rosenmüller, Schol. in *Essiam.*)

Although Jesus expressly appeals to the prophecies of the Old Testament, as testifying of him, yet in none of them is there any allusion to his sufferings. Instead of this, Isaiah (i. 6) speaks of the ill-usage which the prophets were to experience; Isaiah iii. of the calamities of the prophetic race, or of the Israelitish people; Psalm cxviii. of the unexpected deliverance and exaltation of that people, or of their princes; while Psalm xxii. is the complaint of an oppressed exile, and verse 17 has some reference to a person torn by wild beasts in a combat or in the chase.

CHAPTER XXII.

PROPHECIES AND MIRACLES AS TESTS OF A TRUE
RELIGION.

It has been now shewn, that not only the prophecies of the Old Testament cannot have any reference to Jesus as the Messiah, but that any attempts of Jesus to prophecy of himself, or foretell future events, have proved utter failures. The reader will perceive, then, how very unsatisfactory the prophecies are as seals or marks of a true religion, or a test of the truth of these Gospel narratives.

Now let us suppose, that the prophets foresaw and foretold all that is related in these Gospel narratives; this would only shew that these men had some fore-knowledge of such matters, but it could not possibly have proved the truth of any doctrines, or the righteousness of any persons,—and therefore could have been no rational foundation of true religion; and here all prophecy must terminate and can go no farther. The prophets were altogether mistaken in their guesses and conjectures about the Messiah; and as to the establishment of their kingdom in peace and righteousness, they were equally wrong,—in all which their national prejudices and gross ignorance of the nature of true religion were displayed.

Now miracles and prophecies are no proofs of revelation; for we would ask what proof miracles and prophecies can give us of moral truth or the truth of any doctrine, as coming from God and necessary for our salvation? And as to

the life and immortality said to be brought to light by the Gospel, it was nothing new among the Jews in Judæa, since the greater part of the nation had received it before.

Although the early Christians rested the proofs of the Messiahship of Jesus mainly on the agreement of his life with the prophecies, yet we have seen that, in many of those quoted, there appears to be no agreement, and in others the writers did not hesitate to alter them, for the purpose of accommodating them to Jesus' reputed life and acts.

There is also strong reason to suspect that they did not hesitate, when it answered their purpose, even to alter parts in the life of Jesus, so as to correspond with passages in the Old Testament. We have seen also that they selected sentences from all parts of the Old Testament, tearing them from their context, and applying them to Jesus without any regard to their original meaning.

Many of the actions of Jesus were adapted *intentionally* to the prophecies to support his assumed claims, and this put his followers upon seeking out for more evidences. Thus biassed, they imagined they had discovered abundant coincidences in every page; and acquiring thus the habit of making out coincidences, they insensibly altered also their narrative of facts.—(Hennell's Christianity.)

Indeed, to suppose that Almighty Wisdom would adapt this obscure, unsatisfactory, and in many instances dishonest mode of manifesting himself to the world, or of explaining in this mystifying way his wishes and intentions to man, is to believe that he literally intended to confound the wisdom of the wise with the foolishness of prophecy. "For it is monstrous to conceive (says Coleridge) that the Father of all Lights could require, or would accept from the only one of his creatures, whom he hath endowed with reason, the sacrifice of fools!"

The Jews themselves, the chosen people of God, in whose religious code these prophecies are contained, and for whose benefit they were specially written, declare, even to this day, that the true Messiah has not yet appeared, and that few of the passages, quoted by Christians, have any reference to a Messiah, and none whatever to Jesus the son of Joseph.

“How (says a learned Jew) can any man in his senses see in the ‘Immanuel,’ announced by Isaiah, the Messiah whose name is Jesus,—how discover in an obscure and crucified Jew ‘a leader who shall govern Israel,’—how see ‘a royal deliverer and restorer of the Jews’ in one who, far from delivering his nation, came only to destroy their laws, and after whose coming their land was desolated by the Romans! A man must needs be gifted with second light indeed, who can find the Messiah of our holy records in such a personage.”—(*Israel Vindicated.*)

CHAPTER XXIII.

PROPHECIES OF JESUS' DEATH.

JESUS, according to the Gospel writers, evidently saw that he could not realize his own wishes, or the fulfilment of the prophecies, unless he went up boldly to Jerusalem. But from the sad example made of John the Baptist, under nearly similar circumstances, and from the danger attending the attempt, he was deterred, for a long time, from venturing on the experiment. His hopes and fears alternately acted on his mind, and his sayings to his disciples shew, that the latter presentiment greatly predominated. He foresaw, either that there would be a simultaneous movement, human or divine, exhibited in his favour; or that, like John, he would be seized on by the authorities, and put to death.

Enthusiasm cannot blind men to the most obvious consequences of their own actions; and Jesus had already experienced, that his imaginary character of Messiah did not secure him from human infirmities and human dangers. (Matt. viii. 20.)

"From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." (Matt. xvi. 21; xvii. 22; xxvi. 2, 32.)

"Then he took *unto him* the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be

delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and they shall scourge *him*, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again." (Luke xviii. 31, 33; xi. 22, 44.)

Now none of these prophecies can be found in the Old Testament!—Jesus, it may be seen from the tenor of the Gospel narratives, was naturally of a quiet, peaceable, and timid disposition, running away from the least appearance of danger. (See the four Gospels *passim*.) He might naturally look to the result of his mission as very problematical, and express his doubts and fears to his disciples; but farther than this, the testimony is most unsatisfactory, and the sequel not at all reconcileable with a *previous* knowledge and disclosure of his death.

In regard to the above predictions, it is repeatedly stated "that the disciples did not understand that saying" (Mark ix. 32),—"That they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them: neither knew they the things which were spoken" (Luke xviii. 34),—implying that they did not understand the words of Jesus, although spoken so clearly and distinctly; thereby throwing a grave suspicion on the truthfulness of the narrative; and that these predictions never had been made, but were after interpolations.

In confirmation of this, immediately after these confidential predictions of Jesus to the twelve, of his sufferings, death, and resurrection, two of these very twelve, entirely oblivious of his previous words, most innocently ask him for seats on the right and left of his throne, and dispute with each other who should be greatest. (Matt. xx.; Luke ix. 46.) When nigh to Jerusalem they positively expected, in the face of these predictions, that the temporal kingdom of

the Messiah should appear *immediately*; and when at last Jesus is taken and put to death, exactly according to his previous words, they all seemed astonished, and forsook him.

Jesus' condemnation and execution fell on his followers as a blow, for which they were totally unprepared, and which at once annihilated all their hopes. "The chief priests and our rulers have crucified him (said they), but we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel." (Luke xxiv. 20.) This proves the untruthfulness of the above predictions, and that a crucified Messiah was no part of their previous creed. For had Jesus spoken of his death to his disciples, with such perfect openness and plainness as the Gospel writers express, and so clearly shewn them that his death was foreshadowed in the prophecies of the Old Testament, they never could have lost all recollection of his sayings, or all belief in his Messiahship.

It is impossible to avoid the conclusion, that Jesus could not have made any previous announcement or disclosure of his death to his followers. On the contrary, they appear from their own words, up to the end of his career, to have held the common opinion on the subject, that he was about to ascend the throne of David, and restore the kingdom to Israel; and they seem to have adopted the idea of his death *only* after that event had so unexpectedly come upon them.

It never was the opinion of the Jews, that the expected Messiah should die a violent death. Indeed a suffering and dying Messiah was utterly unthought and unheard of among the Jewish nation, "for they had heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever." (John xii. 34.) A crucified Messiah therefore was a *scandalon*, a scandal, a reproach, a stumbling-block to the orthodox Jews, and the extreme of folly to the enlightened Greeks.

The Rabbi Orobio declares, "It was impossible that the Jews should have crucified the true Messiah, since the prophets expressly say, 'That the Messiah should come to cleanse Israel from all sin, and that he will not leave a single stain in Israel.' Now it would be the most horrible sin, the most abominable pollution, as well as the most palpable contradiction, that God should send his Messiah to be crucified." (*Israel Vind.*)—Even many of the early Christian sects were of the same opinion, and did not believe in the death of Jesus; a crucified Messiah was so contrary to their own expectations, and the prophecies of Scripture. The Basilideans affirmed, that Jesus did not suffer, but Simon who bore his cross; and others, that Judas suffered in his stead. The Cerinthians, contemporary with the apostles, and the Capocrations in like manner denied that Jesus could have been crucified.

CHAPTER XXIV.

PROPHECIES OF THE RESURRECTION.

It is reported also that Jesus predicted his own resurrection *as clearly* as that of his death; for as often as he said to his disciples, "The Son of man shall be crucified," he added, "and the third day he shall rise again." But, strange to say, here also his disciples "could not understand him." So that they even debated among themselves "what the rising from the dead could mean." (Mark x. 10.)

Even after his death, the disciples exhibited no traces of any recollection that his resurrection had been foretold; and no expectation that the prediction would be fulfilled; from which we are forced to conclude, that these predictions never were uttered, and never were conceived till after the unexpected event.

John, in the fourth Gospel, makes no mention of these predictions of Jesus; on the contrary, he positively asserts, and expressly declares, that "the disciples knew not that he must rise again from the dead." (John xx. 9.)—So that we may conclude, that all these references of "rising from

* Christians of the present day ask, If such an act as that of falsifying the Scriptures had been perpetrated, were there not many at the time who would have detected and exposed so vile an attempt? We answer, No. For in those times printing was unknown, and written copies of the Gospels were few and far between. Each little church

the dead" are interpolations, added by some dishonest transcriber in support of the new religion of Jesus.*

The friends of Jesus, when they laid his body in the sepulchre, commenced the task of embalming it, which they never would have done, had they known, or even expected, that he would rise again on the third day. And on the morning when the women went to the sepulchre to continue the process, so far from thinking of a resurrection, they only shewed themselves anxious about removing the stone from the mouth of the sepulchre. And when Mary, and afterwards Peter, found the seal broken and the stone removed, and the grave empty, the one conjectured that the body was stolen, and the other wondered what had become of it!

We may here remark, that the narrators have made rather an unlucky oversight in the relation of this reputed miracle. For if it had been in reality a resurrection, and Jesus had ascended into heaven, what occasion was there in giving an angel the trouble of coming to break the seal and remove the stone? The reality of the miracle would have been manifested in finding the seal and stone *intact*, closing the mouth of the tomb, and yet the body gone!—The very fact of its being necessary to break the seal, and remove the stone before liberating the body, shews that human means were employed in its removal.

had its own copy, and each copy differed materially from its neighbour's; and as all these were merely *copies of copies*, there were no means of proving which was the true copy. In such a wretched state had the founder of Christianity left his work! But even at the present day, what have we gained with all the advantages of printing; when we see that passages of Scripture (acknowledged interpolations), and the gross forgeries surreptitiously inserted into Josephus and Tacitus, continue to be retained, and are still referred to by Christian zealots, as evidences in favour of Christianity!

We generally find, that all these supposed miracles and prophecies, and divinations from nature, exhibit their fictitious character by some oversight or inconsistency, and which discovers itself on a closer examination.

When the other women declared to the disciples, that they had met two men, who told them that Jesus had risen, "their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not." (Luke xxiv. 21.) When Mary, and subsequently the disciples going to Emmaus, assured the eleven that they had seen Jesus risen, "they believed them not," (Mark xvi.,) and Thomas, still later, did not believe even the assurance of his brother apostles.

If then, after all these predictions, the disciples did not believe in the resurrection, at the time and place it is stated to have occurred, although declared to them by eye-witnesses,—how is it possible that we, eighteen hundred years after the supposed event, can be expected to give any credence to so unnatural and improbable a tale!

And if the Gospels are faithful narratives, and the disciples, after the death of Jesus, acted in the contradictory manner above related, then we submit, that the death of Jesus could not have been foretold, and the resurrection must have been a fabrication of the disciples for the glorification of Jesus after his crucifixion.

CHAPTER XXV.

JUDAS THE BETRAYER.

It is stated, that Jesus knew from the beginning who should betray him, or, in other words, that he knew from the commencement of his acquaintance with Judas that he would prove a traitor to his cause. Now if Jesus knew this, he must also have been aware of the motives that would lead Judas to commit this act, namely, covetousness and love of money. And yet with all this foreknowledge, knowing that Judas was not trustworthy, and declaring him to be a "devil" (John vi. 70), yet, it seems, he appointed him to the responsible situation of purse-bearer to the party, virtually leading him into temptation.

This is all very improbable and very unlikely, for if Jesus intrusted Judas with the property of his party, or even entertained him in the sacred character of an apostle, knowing him to be an unworthy and ungodly man, then he never could have had any such foreknowledge! And yet John says, "Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him."

Again, when Peter asks Jesus, saying, "Behold, we have forsaken all and followed thee, what reward shall we have?" Jesus without any exception replies, "That when he shall sit on his throne, they shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." So that, at this time, Jesus could have no presentiment that one of the twelve would prove a

traitor, and be lost to him, or in this promise he would have made an exception of Judas.

Besides, it is most unlikely that one of Jesus' own special companions, who had been an eye-witness of all his miracles and mighty works, and was promised such extraordinary rewards when Jesus came to his throne, should betray him for paltry thirty pieces of silver! This would tend to prove that Judas had no faith or belief in Jesus' promises or mighty works, and must have looked on him as a mere pretender to the Messiahship.

Matthew relates, that when Judas saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with such remorse, that he hastened to the chief priests, "cast down the money in the temple, and went and hanged himself." (Matt. xxvii.) But Peter (Acts i.) relates a very different story; that Judas did not cast down the money in the temple, but went and purchased a field with it; that he did *not* hang himself, but fell down, as if by accident, and died of rupture. Peter states, that the field "purchased by Judas" was called the field of blood; but, according to Matthew, it was the priests who purchased the field "to bury strangers in."

The account of the last catastrophe of Judas (says Rev. R. Taylor) in the Gospels and in the Acts, is utterly irreconcilable; and may be thus appositely stated. The Judas *of the Gospels* repented; *of the Acts*, did not repent; *of the Gospels*, despaired; *of the Acts*, triumphed in his iniquity; *of the Gospels*, returned the money; *of the Acts*, kept the money; *of the Gospels*, bore testimony to the innocence of Jesus; *of the Acts*, bore no such testimony; *of the Gospels*, gave back the money to the priests, who put it in the treasury; *of the Acts*, bought a field with it; *of the Gospels*, hanged himself; *of the Acts*, died by accident.—Such is the harmony of the Gospels

This story, whichever way we examine it, bears a fictitious character, surrounded as it is with difficulties and contradictions. This evidently was the opinion of the early Jews; for Celsus, who had carefully examined the grounds of Christianity, and written many works on the subject, reproached the early Christians by insinuating, that Jesus was betrayed by one of those whom he called his apostles, which shewed that he was less capable of attaching his followers to himself than a common robber chief! (*Cels. c. Orig.*) Among the Gnostic Sects, they looked favourably on Judas, and declared, that if he did betray Jesus, he was altogether blameless, as he was merely an instrument of God, and co-operator in the redemption of mankind.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE AGONY SCENE.

It has been already explained that Jesus was in daily fear of his life, and saw that the danger was much increased by coming to Jerusalem. He accordingly, it is told, lived retired in the suburbs of Bethany; and although he occasionally visited the temple, &c., yet he prudently left in the evenings. Accordingly we find, that although he came into the city to eat the passover, yet immediately after he retired hastily with his disciples to a distant garden, called Gethsemane. Here he is described as being in low spirits, and sorrowful, even unto death; probably from having heard, when at supper, that the authorities were in pursuit of him.

The manner in which it is stated that Jesus was apprehended, shews that he was not much known, and that the meetings with his followers were held in secret. As for Judas's betrayal, it was simply giving information where he was; and the paying Judas could only arise from the above cause, that of Jesus being so little known, and living so concealed. This timidity and fear of Jesus, approaching almost to pusillanimity, agrees very ill with his reputed divinity; and his being betrayed—or in other words apprehended, on the information of one of his followers, shews that he did not intend to be apprehended, and consequently did not anticipate being crucified.

John's Gospel, which was written long after the others, relates, that Jesus was arrested *immediately* on his arrival in the garden; the other Gospels however insert a *scene*, said to have taken place in the garden previous to the arrest, and which has been designated, "the Agony of Jesus." The details of this scene, in the three Gospels, differ much, and are but little in keeping with each other.

Jesus, it appears, retires to a distant part of the garden, taking with him his three confidential disciples, and is there seized with great fear and trembling. He declares "that he is sorrowful even unto death,"—and begs of them to remain on the watch, whilst he retires and prays "that this cup of suffering might pass from him," alluding to his arrest and probable death. He returns to his disciples three several times, and finding them asleep, upbraids them with negligence. Luke omits this last act of Jesus, but introduces an "angel" to support him in his mortal struggle; for he relates that Jesus' fears had so overcome him, and his agony was so great, that "he sweated great drops of blood, falling to the ground."

Here the reader will observe that Matthew, who was not present, relates in detail, and in an earnest and pathetic manner, the prayers and movements of Jesus; whilst his only companions and witnesses of the scene were asleep! He must have gained this knowledge by inspiration.

From the earliest times this "agony scene and sweating drops of blood" have been a sad stumbling-block to believers in Jesus' divinity; as it must be allowed that he betrayed a weakness of mind and fear of death, most unbecoming as a man, and most unworthy as the reputed Messiah. Celsus and Julian both express their contempt at the imbecility of character and fear of death displayed by Jesus in this garden scene, and give it as a proof that he was a

poor weak mortal and not superior to other men, who preached faith to others but shewed a deficiency in himself. What occasion was there for all this fear and terror in Jesus, or for the assistance of an angel to support him in his agony, when, from his own declaration, he had at his command myriads of ministering angels to protect him from his enemies? Luke is the only one who introduces the angel in this scene, which it is conjectured was by way of glorification, as none of the other Gospels take any notice of this angelic apparition. And Luke also is the only one who speaks of the bloody sweat, declared in the 19th century to be a physiological impossibility !

Jesus himself seems to have had no idea that his death was necessary, else why pray so earnestly that he should not be put to such a trial ; and that the cup of sorrow might pass from him ? It can scarcely be imagined, that he would have spent a whole night in such passionate prayers and supplications to God, to prevent an occurrence which he knew must happen, to which he had previously consented, and for which purpose alone he came into the world.

We put it to the impartial reader, would the Saviour and friend of mankind have exhibited such reluctance, and have thus declined a few hours of bodily suffering, in a way that many thousands have endured both before and since, if he had been satisfied that, by that suffering, he would destroy the power of Satan, and open the gates of heaven to a world of lost creatures ?

It is difficult to explain away this awful fright of Jesus at the bare idea of the approach of death, which every well-regulated mind can support with firmness and equanimity ; and of which so many men, in those times set such noble examples. But this only confirms our previous remark, that Jesus was a timid, nervous man.

It is strange that John, who was one of the three that accompanied Jesus, should not come forward with his testimony, but passes over the whole in utter silence, without taking any notice of it; for, apparently to do away with the evil effects of this strange scene, he previously introduces Jesus, at the last supper, as addressing the disciples in the cheerful tone of one, who had already triumphed over all approaching sufferings and all fear of death.

But even supposing John's version to be true, how is it to be accounted for, that immediately after the supper, this tranquil and cheerful tone should give place to violent mental anguish, and this peace of mind to sorrow bordering on death; and that he should sink into such a state of despondency, as to require the assistance of a ministering angel to support him?

The other three Gospels mention not a word of these farewell discourses of Jesus, as described by John. Now in this dilemma there is but one alternative,—the agony scene and the discourses *both* cannot have taken place,—*one must be* A FABRICATION.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ARREST OF JESUS.

JESUS is now arrested, and according to Matthew, Judas steps forth and kisses him; but according to John, he does not salute him at all, for Jesus himself steps forward to the guard, and declares, "I am he;" which John declares so alarmed the people present, that "from the spirit of his mouth, they went back and fell to the ground." (John xviii. 6.)

The reader may see, from these exaggerations, that John is not to be depended on in his narrative, he is so fond of embellishment, and of giving his *fancies* to the world as facts; and differs in his relation so widely from the other Gospel writers. Strauss says, that John wished to make it appear, that Jesus thus voluntarily gave himself up, to do away with the assertions of the early opponents of Christianity, who imputed the hasty retirement of Jesus from the supper, into the distant garden, "as an ignominious flight from his enemies;" and which view was confirmed by his placing a watch, and his subsequent fear and agony.

Matthew and Mark both relate that all Jesus' disciples fled away and left him. This is another proof of the little faith and confidence they had in his promises, or in his power to deliver them or himself from his enemies. For if Jesus had impressed, on the minds of his followers, that he was the Messiah, and if he had in reality performed the mighty works imputed to him by the Gospel writers, is

it likely that this disgraceful flight and fear could have taken place ? Even his three favourite disciples deserted him ; and not one remained to take his part, or come forward during his trial, as witnesses in his behalf.

Peter indeed, whom Jesus had expressly told to "feed his sheep," and which has been interpreted by the Catholic portion of the Christian Church as being appointed to the head of his Church, from his previously declared conviction that he was the Messiah, even he, when brought forward and confronted with Jesus, swore and stoutly denied "that he had ever seen or known him." (Matt. xxvi. 70.)

We regret to acknowledge that every step we take in our inquiry into this Gospel story, only shakes our belief the more as to its truthfulness, for it is not narrated like truth.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

PETER'S DENIAL.

WHEN Jesus was arrested and all the disciples had forsaken him and fled, it appears that Peter had followed at a distance, and entered with the guard into the court of the palace. He is here recognised, and repeatedly taxed as one of Jesus' followers, but as repeatedly denied all knowledge of him. On this is founded a prediction of Jesus, said to be fulfilled by the crowing of a cock !

We should scarcely think this incident worthy of notice, were it not to point out, even in this trifling instance, unworthy of prophecy, the many discrepancies of the Gospel writers ; and again to draw attention to the small faith and belief in Jesus, manifested by Peter, after his solemn declaration, "Thou art Jesus, son of the living God." After this scene, can we really think that Peter was serious, when he made this declaration, and really believed what he averred ; or may we not fairly conclude, that he was playing on the simplicity and vanity of his credulous master ?

In regard to Peter's denial of Jesus, the Gospels all agree in stating that there were *three* acts of denial, in accordance with the prediction of Jesus ; but in the statement of the instances, both as regards the place where, the person to whom, and the manner in which Peter made the denial, they are all at variance. Jesus speaks of a *threefold* denial, whereas it would appear from the Gospels that Peter denied

all knowledge of Jesus from six to nine times! But what happened *repeatedly*, is represented as having been, agreeably to the prediction, *precisely three times*,—in order to form the closest approximation to its fulfilment.

The completion of this prophecy was “the crowing of a cock,” after the third denial; but Mark, in his anxiety to fulfil the prophecy, blunders, and makes the cock crow after the first denial! (Mark xiv. 68.) Matthew and Mark proceed to tell us, that on hearing the cock crow, Peter remembered the words of Jesus, and wept; but Luke adds, by way of embellishment, that Jesus turned and looked at Peter, who broke out into bitter weeping.—Now, according to Matthew and Mark, Peter was not in the same locality as Jesus when the denial took place; so that this event could not have occurred as related. Matthew and Mark state that Jesus was led into the palace before Caiaphas the high priest,—now Peter sat in the porch without the palace, and where the denial took place. (Mark xiv. 71.)

CHAPTER XXIX.

JESUS' TRIAL.

THE first three Gospels relate, that Jesus was brought before Pilate, the procurator ; and, after the people had made their complaint against him, Pilate asked him,—“ Answerest thou nothing ; hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee ? ” “ But he answered him never a word.” (Matt. xxvii.)

Here Matthew alone introduces the following episode, that when Pilate had sat on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him saying, Have nothing to do with that Just man, for I have suffered many things this day, *in a dream*, because of him ; and when Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing with his accusers, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, “ I am innocent of the blood of this just person : see ye to it.” (Matt. xxvii.)

Now we affirm, that this is a most unlikely act for a Roman judge to commit, and derogatory to his high position, in the discharge of his official duty, to yield to the people contrary to his own judgment. In regard to the dream of Pilate's wife, this is the sixth instance, in this Gospel, where *dreams* are introduced as the medium of divine communication. The story is apparently brought forward as a testimony to the righteousness of Jesus ; for if it was intended as an effective warning, it would have been addressed to Pilate himself, as it appears he disregarded his wife's dream.

Neither Mark, Luke, nor John take any notice of this dream or declaration, shewing, either that they discredited Matthew's account and omitted it altogether, or that it was introduced afterwards by some over-zealous transcriber; for there is little doubt of its being a fabrication.

Luke, in his version, differs somewhat from Matthew by adding, that Pilate, out of courtesy, first sent Jesus to Herod for examination, who, gratified at this, hoped to see some miracle done by him; and certainly there could not have been a better opportunity for Jesus to have manifested, by his signs and wonders, the truth of his mission. Had he made a convert of Herod, it would have been a great step to the conversion of the whole nation, who, anxiously looking out for the expected Messiah, only required respectable and satisfactory evidence of the truth of his mission.

In these Gospel narratives, Jesus is represented as exhibiting his miracles daily to the ignorant multitude who could not understand him, but went away "amazed and wondering," whilst before men of rank and education he is stated to have been silent. Such men could have appreciated his miracles, and would have been held up to future generations as good and unexceptionable testimony.

John's Gospel, supposed by many to have been written in the second century, and the writer of which had the benefit of hearing the subject canvassed, has written a very different account of Jesus. Instead of harmonising with the other Gospels in their account of this trial, and in the silence which Jesus persevered in, he causes him to give full and copious answers to all the questions put to him.

Pilate accordingly is made to ask Jesus, "Art thou king of the Jews?" and Jesus' answer is given in a petulant and unbecoming spirit: "Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?" (John xviii. 34.) Now in an

accused person, however conscious of innocence, such an evasive and indecorous answer was unwarrantable, and unlike the language usually put into the mouth of Jesus.

"Pilate again asks Jesus, Art thou a king then?" and Jesus answers: "Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto *the truth*; every one that is of the *truth* heareth my voice." Pilate at once put an end to these irrelevant remarks of Jesus, by asking one simple question: "*What is truth?*" and Jesus, unable to answer this home question, remained silent; and Pilate, receiving no reply, left the court.

"What is truth?"—This is a question more easily asked than answered—that every one reads but few understand; and we can easily imagine, that however freely Jesus might talk of "the truth," yet he would find himself quite unable to reply to this searching question; and it was accordingly left unanswered.

But another point creates great suspicion of the truthfulness of this narrative. John informs us, that the trial went on in the interior of the Prætorium, which no Jew would venture to enter. Who then heard this conversation of Jesus? who was the informant? and who communicated it to the writer of John's Gospel?—We can only come to the conclusion that this reported conversation is the inspiration of the writer's imagination, in which we submit he has done Jesus' character much injustice.

Jesus' supposed answers to Pilate deserve some consideration, as conveying the mystical and peculiar notions of the Platonic Christians of the second century. Jesus says to Pilate: "Thou couldest have no power *at all* against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin."

Now for a divine revelation, this appears to us strange reasoning, for if he that delivered up Jesus had his power to do so from God, his sin most assuredly would be *less* rather than *greater*.

Peter confirms the above, when he says: "Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." (Acts ii. 23.) But if Jesus were put to death by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, there surely could be no blame attaching to any one, as they were only instruments in God's hands to execute his decrees. But we can readily conceive, that a religion carried out by a number of ignorant and fanatical men, putting their crude ideas into the mouth of Jesus, must necessarily contain a large mass of incomprehensible and incongruous matter, —which has certainly kept the world alive for the last two thousand years.

CHAPTER XXX.

CRUCIFIXION.

JESUS, at length, is condemned to be crucified ; and even in the account of his progress to the place of execution, there is a divergency between John and the other Gospels ; for John causes Jesus to carry the cross himself, whilst the others state that one Simon of Cyrene bore it in his stead. Two malefactors, it seems, were crucified with Jesus, one on his right hand and the other on his left.

Now regarding the demeanour of these fellow-sufferers, John is totally silent, Matthew and Mark merely represent them as reviling Jesus ; but Luke introduces a legendary story of very doubtful character, but which has done more mischief to the morals of mankind than almost any other of Jesus' reputed sayings. He narrates, that when one of the thieves derided Jesus, calling on him, " If thou be the Christ, save thyself and us," the other rebuked him, and turning to Jesus said, " Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom," and that Jesus answered, " Verily I say unto thee, to-day thou shalt be with me in paradise."

Here the answer of Jesus to the thief is conceived quite in the Jewish spirit and belief, and he here again disproves his divine nature by declaring, that he and the thief had to pass through the same ordeal after death, and were to meet together in Paradise or Hades, which, according to the prevalent idea of the Jews, was that place that was to harbour

the souls of the "chosen people," in the interval between death and the advent of the Messiah. Now Jesus promises that the thief should accompany him, *not to heaven*, but to this intermediate place called Hades or Paradise.

That the thief on the cross should address Jesus as the Messiah is most improbable, as it presupposes a knowledge of Jesus' Messiahship, which even the apostles themselves, with all his explanations, did not comprehend at the time. It is so improbable (says Strauss) that it cannot excite surprise to find, that many, to relieve themselves of the difficulty, insist on its being a miracle!

This unfortunate saying, put into the mouth of Jesus, that all the crimes of the thief on the cross were forgiven, merely for affirming his belief in him, is the origin of all those scenes of death-bed conversions, and repentance of robbers and murderers on the scaffold, which daily outrage the better feelings of mankind!

From this promise of Jesus has originated two monstrous doctrines, namely, that simple belief in him is sufficient in itself to save the vilest sinner, and that the worst criminal on the scaffold, if he express his contrition and declare his belief in Jesus (not God), is sure of salvation.—This doctrine is eagerly embraced by the worst of characters, as an apology for persisting in their career of wickedness.

But all these tales tended to the glorification of Jesus, which at the time was an important object, as it required them all to lessen the opprobrium of his obscure birth and ignominious death; and enabled the disciples to shew all these sayings and doings as testimony in his favour. If Pilate had borne witness in favour of Jesus; if shortly after a Roman centurion, nay even all nature, by its miraculous convulsions, had attested his exalted character; so his

fellow-sufferer could not remain impervious to the conviction of his divine nature, and he also displayed faith in Jesus at the eleventh hour, even on the cross!

There is no doubt that Jesus, up to the last moment, entertained the fond but delusive hope that God would exhibit a miracle in his favour, and prove to the world the divinity of his mission. He evidently trusted to this, in preference to any futile attempt on the part of himself or his followers. He therefore told Peter to put up his sword, and confidently declared that he needed no human aid; "thinkest thou that I cannot pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" Jesus, therefore, had every confidence that heaven would not desert him in his utmost need, but, at the appointed time, would come to his aid and deliver him out of the hands of his enemies.

Before Pilate, he still clung to the same hope, and remained silent in the midst of accusations and revilings. He even permitted himself to be nailed to the cross, without a murmur; and patiently and confidently waited for the manifestation of God's promise in his behalf. But the faith which had been able to expel demons, and which it was hoped might be able, when fully relied on, to cast mountains into the sea, was now found insufficient to triumph over the formidable realities with which Jesus had to contend; *the last resource had failed*; and when his spirit began to flag, and he became weak, and thirsty, and faint, he then began to suspect that he had been deceived in his long-cherished hopes of succour from on high, and at length resigning all hope, he passionately upbraided God for so cruelly deserting him, in those memorable words: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. xxvii. 46.)

As in the agony scene, so here also, poor human nature got the better of Jesus. It is impossible to resist the conviction that his corporal sufferings, united to the bitter prostration of all his hopes, overwhelmed him to such a degree, that he felt himself utterly abandoned by God, and exhibited in both these instances a weakness of mind and want of fortitude quite inconsistent with the character he had assumed.

We agree with Strauss, that if Jesus, as the Gospels narrate, had predicted his own sufferings and death, and had included them in his idea of the Messiah, and hence had regarded them as part of the divine arrangement, he would scarcely have complained of them, when they actually arrived, as an abandonment by God. We should rather think, says Reimarus, that he found himself deceived in the expectations he had formed and previously cherished, and thus believed himself forsaken of God. John and Luke have prudently suppressed in their Gospels this unlucky exclamation !

“ The behaviour of Jesus (says Burder) in the last scene of his life fully disproves his claims to kingship and divinity, and shows that he was a weak-minded man, who had been deceiving himself and deceived others. Fully impressed with the idea of his divine mission, when first apprehended he surrendered himself without a struggle, because, as he said, ‘ the Scriptures must be fulfilled.’ On his trial, he stood mute, because he refused to acknowledge any earthly jurisdiction. But at last, overcome by the sufferings of human nature, and finding that God did not come to his relief, he cried out in the agony of pain and despair, ‘ My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ thus giving up the belief in the divinity of his mission !”

Concerning the last words of Jesus, there is no manner

of agreement among the Gospel writers. Matthew and Mark relate, that Jesus "cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost;" Luke states that he said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit," and according to John, that he merely said, "It is finished." These are most unlikely expressions for Jesus to make, after his previous exclamation of abandonment by God; but their discrepancy shews their fabrication.

The accounts that are given of the circumstances that the Evangelists tell us attended the crucifixion, are differently related by them. Matthew says :

"Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many." (Matt. xxvii. 45, 51—53.)

Mark, on the contrary, makes no mention of any earthquake, nor of the rocks rending, nor of the graves opening, nor of the dead men walking about the city. Luke and John are also equally silent on the subject. Now if it had been true that those things had really happened, it was not possible for them as true historians, even without the aid of inspiration, not to have recorded them. Such things were of too much notoriety not to have been known, and of too much importance not to have been recorded.

The Gospels differ widely as to the time of the day when Jesus was crucified, one making it the third hour, another the sixth hour, and another the ninth hour of the day. There is also as much uncertainty about the epoch of the death of Jesus as about his birth, and whether he was cruci-

fied in the 15th, 16th, or 19th year of Tiberius, or whether he was crucified at all !

The early fathers, moreover, differ as to the length of his public ministry ; some assign but one year, others two years, and Eusebius makes it three years before his crucifixion. In fact, there is no certainty in anything connected with the life, acts, sayings, or death of this personage. The only records handed down to us are the four contradictory anonymous Gospels ; for none of the historians of that period take any notice of him, or seem to have been aware that such a person as "the Jesus of the Gospels" ever existed !

CHAPTER XXXI.

JESUS' RESURRECTION.

DID Jesus rise from the dead? On this important question hangs the whole of the Christian's hopes; for, as Paul declares, "if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain."

Although the account of the resurrection in the Gospels is very unsatisfactory, the writers contradicting each other in many particulars, yet they chiefly agree in this—that Mary and others went early to the sepulchre, and discovered that the seal was broken, the stone removed from the mouth of the tomb, and the body of Jesus gone. (John xx.) On reporting this to Peter and others, they also went and confirmed the statement. After this there arose other reports that Jesus was seen in different places, and that some persons had told Mary "that Jesus was risen and gone into Galilee." The body had however disappeared; and the common report was that it had been stolen. Jesus' followers therefore assumed and gave out that, "as he had disappeared, he was risen from the dead and had ascended into heaven."

It was the habit of the Jews at all times, when any one had disappeared and no one knew what had become of him, to conclude "that God had taken him." Enoch was missing, and he was declared to be translated into heaven, and that God took him. (Gen. v.) Elijah disappeared, and it was given out that he went up into heaven in a

whirlwind. (2 Kings ii.) Jesus was missing; he also, it was conjectured, had risen from the dead and ascended into heaven,—and from such data the friends of Jesus arrived at this foregone conclusion.

Matthew says, "Behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it." The other Gospels say nothing about any earthquake, nor about the angel rolling back the stone and sitting upon it; for, according to their account, there was no angel sitting there. Mark says, the angel was within the sepulchre sitting on the right side,—Luke says, that there were two angels, both standing up,—and! John says, they were both sitting down, one at the head and the other at the feet!

We have already shown, that the Gospel writers fell into a sad error in narrating this event, by acknowledging that the seal was broken, and the stone which covered the mouth of the sepulchre removed; for if they had intended a *real* miracle and a *true* resurrection, they ought to have left the seal and the stone *untouched*, and yet the body gone; therein would have consisted the real miracle. The very fact of it being necessary to break the seal and remove the stone for the purpose of liberating the body of Jesus would show, that *human* and not divine means had been employed in effecting this object,—and thus they have exposed its fictitious character.

Now on the above obscure and unauthenticated report of four anonymous writers is founded the resurrection of Jesus—the corner-stone of Christianity, and the only proof there is of the resurrection of the dead! The reader will perceive that there is not a particle of evidence to support it, as no one saw it, nor were there any eye-witnesses present when it is assumed that it occurred. So this legend

of "the resurrection of the dead" is founded on mere assumption.

Joseph and Nicodemus, we find, were the last persons in charge of the body, and we should naturally expect to have had some account of it from them. Their silence here, where their testimony would have been so useful, is very suspicious; and would lead us to suppose that the whole affair was contrived by them, to relieve themselves from the presence of his followers and avoid the suspicion of the authorities.

The account given in the Gospels supplies us with the remaining statement, viz.—that the women came to the tomb early, and found that the body was gone. On a subsequent visit, they found a young man there, no doubt placed in charge by Joseph, the owner of the garden; and he told them that Jesus was risen and gone into Galilee.

From the earnestness with which John dwells on the last events of Jesus' life, and the strong asseverations wherewith he declares himself to have witnessed the piercing, more properly *pricking* his side (John xix.), it would appear, that already in his time this important event had been called in question.

The Basilidians affirmed, that Jesus did not suffer, but Simon who bore his cross; and others again that Judas suffered in his stead. The Corinthians, contemporary with the apostles, and the Capocrations in like manner denied that Jesus had been crucified.

CHAPTER XXXII.

DID JESUS DIE ON THE CROSS?

IN the first two centuries, the professors of Christianity were divided into many sects, which may be resolved into two divisions. One consisting of Nazarenes, Ebionites, &c., the other of Gnostics, under which the remaining sects arranged themselves. The former believed in Jesus crucified in the literal sense, the latter admitted the crucifixion, but only in a spiritual or mystical sense, and not to have literally taken place. They denied that Christ did really die on the cross. This is the view taken by Paulus, and other commentators, who think that Jesus did not die on the cross, but was taken down in a state of asphyxia or syncope. According to Josephus, other persons crucified lived from three to nine days; and hence the two thieves were not dead at evening, and Jesus was only *six hours* on the cross.

Many believed that Jesus' crucifixion was intended merely as an exposure, to frighten him out of what they considered an insane delusion, as there were so many impostors going about, at that time, all aspirants to the Messiahship. This view is corroborated by Pilate declaring that he found no fault in him, and his desire to liberate him; by the gentleness with which he was treated, his cross being borne by another; by the giving him vinegar to quench his thirst; by the alarm of the guards when he fainted, and their pricking his side to see if he were dead, and their run-

ning off to report the matter to the Procurator. And finally, by their not proceeding to the death-blow by breaking his legs and arms, and taking him down after being only a few hours on the cross.

Nothing is more probable than that fatigue, loss of blood, and mental anguish, should have produced extreme exhaustion and syncope,—in which state Jesus was placed at the disposal of his friends, who, after rubbing the body with aromatics (the very best means of restoring animation), had left him to his repose in the quiet of the sepulchre. On his recovering from this state of suspended animation, he was privately removed by his friends during the night; and as he left word to his disciples “After that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee,” he most probably returned thither.

Mark corroborates this view (in chap. xvi. 6, 11), where describing the visit of the two Marys to the sepulchre, the young man in charge says to them:

“Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: *he is risen*; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter *that he goeth before you into Galilee*: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.

“Now when *Jesus* was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, *out of whom he cast seven devils*. And she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept. And they, when they had heard *that he was alive*, and had been seen of her, believed not.” (Mark xvi. 6, 7, 9—11.)

Here Mark, the Evangelist, declares that Jesus had risen out of the sepulchre, and gone into Galilee, whither the disciples were to follow him; and “that he was alive.” Now this view of the case, thus confirmed by Jesus afterwards showing himself to his disciples, eating and drinking, and talking to them as formerly, is certainly the most natural

explanation; but very unlike a spirit, or being of the other world, for he was particularly cautious in offering himself to public view, when his taking one turn in the public marketplace, or in the temple, would have been the greatest of all miracles; and would have spared the painful labours and lives of so many vouchers who perished, merely by these things being "done in a corner."

Again, if Jesus had died on the cross, how could he have exhibited himself to his disciples, as a *living man*, and especially directed their attention to his being, in reality, flesh and blood?

"Reach hither thy finger," (said Jesus,) "and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust *it* into my side, and be not faithless, but believing." (John xx. 27.)

Here is Jesus presenting himself for the express purpose of demonstrating to the senses of his friends that he was no phantom, no spirit, no shadow; but a solid and living body, that might be seen, and touched, and felt. Now if the body were solid, and could be seen and felt, and required nourishment to support it,—then is the account that Jesus had really been "crucified, dead, and buried," a fiction, by evidence as strong as ever was adduced, namely, *the evidence of Jesus himself!*

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ORIGIN OF CHRISTIANITY.

HERE the question arises—Who was this person called JESUS, as described in the four Gospels, thus surrounded by a halo of wonders and miracles?

We have no proof *from history* of the existence of such a person; and the titles of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, at the head of each Gospel, are admitted to be fabrications. In the books themselves there is not the least intimation respecting their authors, nor when, nor where they were written. The historians of the first century take no notice of him whatever, nor do they seem to have been aware that such a person as the Jesus of the Gospels ever existed.

Now if three kings came from the East guided by a star,—if Herod and all Jerusalem were so troubled as to order the massacre of all the infant children in Bethlehem,—if Jesus so openly restored sight to the blind, and raised people from the dead,—if, at the time of his execution, the sun was totally eclipsed, the earth quaked, and the dead arose out of their graves and appeared unto many; if all these and many more wonders really took place in open day, and in the sight of thousands of Jews as well as Romans, surely the historians of the times would have placed on record events so notorious and so wonderful! And yet, strange to say, Josephus and Philo, both Jewish historians, and Tacitus, and Pliny, and Seneca, Roman historians, who all lived about that time, mention not one word of these events.

Josephus does specially mention *one Jesus*, who went about the streets, crying, "Woe to Jerusalem, woe to Jerusalem," and was believed by the people to be under the influence of a divine furor,—that he was scourged till his bones were bare, but without murmuring; that he then disappeared (after the crucifixion) for four years, but again he appeared at the passover before the siege, A. D. 70, where he was killed by a stone thrown by the Roman engines.

Irenæus, bishop of Lyons, A. D. 120, tells us, in distinct words, and on the authority of his master, St Polycarp, who had it from St John himself, that Jesus was fifty years old *at least* at the time of his death, for which statement he alleges the unanimous testimony of all the old men (*omnes seniores*) of Asia.

Now Josephus was the celebrated Jewish historian, who lived in Jerusalem in the time of Herod, and at the time Jesus is related to have exhibited his wonders and miracles. It seems strange, then, that he should detail the particulars of John the Baptist's history, who ran almost the same career as the Gospel writers assert Jesus to have done, and yet have omitted to mention Jesus and his acts altogether; more especially as he introduces Judas Galileus and the other aspirants to the Messiahship, and gives detailed accounts of them.

It is almost impossible and quite improbable, that Josephus should have omitted some mention of Jesus, if all that is related in the Gospels, or any part, be true. We must therefore conclude, that the above account, referred to by Josephus, related to the Jesus of the Gospels; but that he did not perform the wonderful works attributed to him. For although Josephus enters minutely into all the details of Herod's reign, and writes in most laudatory terms of

John the Baptist (Jos. viii. c. 5), and speaks of a *Jesus* apparently with the same honesty of purpose, yet he does not seem to have been aware, nor does he mention one word of his mighty works, or of his miracles, or of his pretensions.

Now there is little doubt, that the Jesus of Josephus and the Jesus of the Gospels are one and the same person, that he went about, as related by Josephus and Matthew, exhorting the people; and calling on them to repent; that he had attached to him a number of poor followers of the Essenian Sect; but that he remained so obscure, so insignificant, and so harmless, during the short period of his mission, as to have escaped the notice of historians; and that the short account of him as given by Josephus, highly embellished by different rude hands, some forty or fifty years after, is the origin of the Gospels. The following is the account as given by Josephus in detail.

“But what is still more terrible, there was one Jesus
“the son of Ananas, a plebeian and husbandman, who four
“years before the war began, and at a time when the city
“was in very great peace and prosperity, came to that feast,
“whereon it is our custom for every one to make tabernacles to God in the temple,—began suddenly to cry aloud
“‘A voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from
“the four winds, a voice against Jerusalem and the holy
“house, a voice against the bridegrooms and the brides, and
“a voice against this whole people.’ This was his cry, as
“he went about by day and by night, in all the lanes of the
“city.

“However, certain of the most eminent among the people
“had great indignation at this dire cry of his, and took up
“the man and gave him a great number of severe stripes;

“yet did he not either say anything for himself, or anything peculiar to those who chastised him, but still went on with the same words which he cried before.

“Hereupon, our rulers supposing, as the case proved to be, that this was a sort of *divine furor* in the man, brought him to the Roman Procurator, where he was whipped till his bones were laid bare; yet did not he make any supplication for himself, nor shed any tears; but tuning his voice to the most lamentable tone possible, at every stroke of the whip, his answer was, ‘Woe, woe to Jerusalem.’ And when Albinus, for he was then Procurator, asked him, ‘Who he was, and whence he came, and why he uttered such words?’ he made no manner of reply to what he said, but still did not leave off his melancholy ditty, till Albinus took him to be a madman, and dismissed him.

“Now during all the time that passed before the war began, this man did not go near any of the citizens, nor was seen by them while he had said so; but he every day uttered these lamentable words, as if it were his premeditated vow,—‘Woe, woe to Jerusalem.’ Nor did he give ill words to any of those that beat him every day, nor good words to those that gave him food; but this was his reply to all men, and indeed no other than a melancholy presage of what was to come.

“This cry of his was the loudest at the festivals; and he continued this ditty for seven years and five months without growing hoarse, or being tired therewith, until the very time that he saw his presage in earnest fulfilled in our siege, when it ceased. For as he was going round upon the wall, he cried out with his utmost force, ‘Woe, woe to the city again, and to the people, and to the holy

“house;” and just as he added, at the last, ‘Woe, woe to myself also,’ there came a stone out of one of the engines, “and smote him, and killed him instantly; and as he was “uttering the very same presages, he gave up the ghost.” (Jos. Wars, 6, v. 3, vi.)

The reader will observe here the striking similarity between this account by Josephus, and that in the Gospels;—his name Jesus; his obscure origin and humble occupation; his repeated exclamations against Jerusalem and the temple; his prophesying their downfall, and almost in the very words of Matthew; his denunciations against the people; his gentleness, and meekness, and resignation; his being beaten with many stripes without a murmur; his being seized and brought before the Roman Procurator; his answering never a word to his questioners; the Procurator’s declaration of finding no fault in him; his being whipped till his bones were bare; his attending the Passover and festivals; and his visit to the temple,—all show a coincidence that could scarcely arise from chance.

We need not be surprised to find a discrepancy in the names and dates in the narratives of Jesus, as given by Matthew and Josephus; for the obscurity of his parentage, and his equivocal birth, left him without any family name or designation, but simply that of Jesus, “being, *as was supposed*, the son of Joseph.” (Luke iii. 23.)

It has been already shewn that Matthew, in his narrative, makes a mistake of twelve years in the time of the birth of Jesus; but there is no agreement in Scripture as to the place of his birth, and no certainty whatever either as to the length of his mission, or the year in which he was crucified; so that, from the great obscurity of the individual, and “from the respectable people (according to Josephus)

looking on him to be a madman, under the influence of a divine furor," he evidently excited but little attention at the time.

Josephus, who wrote some thirty years after, might be easily led into a mistake, in names and dates, as well as the anonymous Gospel writers; and we see that they, in detailing his history, gave themselves little trouble, either about dates or names, in the relation. For, in those times, there were the most contradictory accounts regarding this person Jesus, so as almost to lead many to the conclusion that no such person ever existed; some believing that he had no corporeal existence; others that his first appearance on earth was at John's baptism; and Apollos and others, even of John's followers, some twenty years after, had never heard either of Jesus or of the Holy Ghost. (Acts xviii. 25; xix. 2.)

The most prevalent opinion was that of the Gnostics of the three first centuries, who believed that Jesus had existed *in appearance* only, and not in reality; and this opinion prevailed largely among the better educated, till Popery was finally established. His crucifixion even was much disputed in the first century by his professed followers. In fact, no one appeared to know, for a certainty, anything about him as regarded either his birth, his education, his life, or death; and the most improbable legends and tales were circulated.

Philo Judeus, the historian, who lived and wrote in the first century, and who is stated by Eusebius to have met and conversed with the Apostle Peter at Rome, has never thrown out the most remote hint, that he had ever heard of Jesus, his acts, or miracles. And yet he wrote largely of the Essenians, who held precisely the doctrinal belief described in the Gospels, and which is there attributed to

Jesus; and who are believed by many to be the same that introduced this new religion, under the name of Ebionites or Nazarenes.—This is another proof of the obscurity of Jesus, and that he never could have performed the mighty works or uttered the wise sayings put to his credit, or he never could have been so entirely unnoticed and unknown.

“It is impossible (says Müller in reply to Lessing) that there should have been a Christ seventeen hundred years ago, who literally wrought such wonders as these. Had any man, by his mere word, caused the blind to see, and the lame to walk, given health to the leper, and strength to the palsied, fed thousands with a few loaves, and even raised the dead,—all men must have esteemed him divine, all men must have followed him. Only imagine what you yourself would have thought of such a man; and human nature is the same in all ages; and with so many followers, the scribes and Pharisees never could have put him to death.—(Ilgen's Zeitschrift.)

Neander, the last champion of the Church, in his *Life of Christ*, 1848, appears to be so fully aware of the entire want of any historical evidence regarding Jesus, his acts, or his miracles, that he is constrained to admit, that he cannot enter on a defence of Jesus and the Gospels, unless permitted *to take many things for granted!* He accordingly pre-supposes “as a great truth, that Jesus is a God-man;” and on this assumption has, of course, no difficulty in arriving at any and every conclusion he wishes, however miraculous or improbable.—His own words are:

“It has been often said, that in order to true inquiry, we must take nothing for granted. At the outset of our work, we refuse to meet such a demand. To comply with it is impracticable; the very attempt contradicts the sacred laws of our being. We cannot entirely free ourselves from

pre-suppositions. What then is the special pre-supposition with which we must approach the life of Christ? It is, in a word, the belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, in a sense that cannot be predicated of any human being,—the truth, that Christ is God-man being pre-supposed."

This truly is a candid, but most unfortunate admission, as it at once acknowledges, that these things are not and cannot be proved either from internal or external evidence, and that they must therefore be assumed. Now Neander may lay down what premises he pleases, and may assume what pre-suppositions he likes, but he must first prove his premises to be sound, and his pre-suppositions true, before they can be received as matters of fact.

The simple fact, of the Jesus of the Gospels never being once mentioned by any writers of the age, shews one of two things:—either that they had never heard or known anything about him, or that he had never spoken or done anything worthy of record. And the fact of a solitary sentence, proved to have been a forgery of the early Christians, being surreptitiously inserted into Josephus, strengthens the opinion of his utter obscurity, and the necessity that was forced on these people of propping up the unauthenticated and uncorroborated Gospel narratives, by such dishonest and disreputable artifices.* "These compositions (the Gospels) says the Rev. Mr Evanson, do nevertheless betray so great a degree of ignorance of the geography, statistics,

*. Joa. Antiq. XVIII. iii. 3.—"Those who are best acquainted (says Rev. Dr Giles) with the character of Josephus and the style of his writings, have no hesitation in condemning this passage as a *forgery*; interpolated in the text, during the third century, by some pious Christian, who was scandalized, that so famous a writer as Josephus should have taken no notice of the Gospels or of Christ their subject." (*Giles' Heathen Records*.)—See also *Gibbon's Rome*.

and circumstances of Judea at the time supposed, as to put it beyond all question that the writers were neither witnesses nor contemporaries of the scenes or actions they relate." (*Dissonance of the Gospels.*)

Taking then Josephus to be a better testimony regarding a point of history, and more to be depended on than the anonymous Gospel writers, we have no difficulty in explaining, on natural principles, the preternatural statement of the Gospel narratives—namely, that Jesus was merely punished by being nailed to the cross, and taken down after a few hours in a state of asphyxia or suspended animation; that he was recovered from this state in the privacy of the sepulchre; and quietly removed by his friends during the night. His frequent visits to his disciples afterwards are then easily explained, and also his ultimate disappearance through dread of the authorities,—until the excitement, produced by the siege of Jerusalem, overcame his natural timidity, and brought him again to his former scene of action, where he was killed, as related by Josephus.

From all the above considerations, and from the close agreement between the accounts of Josephus and the Gospels, we cannot but repeat our conviction that we consider them identical, and to refer to one and the same individual; and that the Jesus of Josephus is the very Jesus of the Gospel history, *in its simple naturalness*, freed from its romance, and divested of all the false embellishments of miracles and prophecies, of angels and devils, of visions and dreams, with which it has been so cruelly disfigured.

The precepts, exhortations, and doctrines attributed to Jesus, we have already shewn to be all of Essenian origin, and were in existence in the writings and teachings of that austere people long before the time of Jesus; and circulated

all over Judea by their missionaries, who no doubt were the disciples and apostles mentioned in the Gospels.

But among people looking out daily for the advent of their Messiah, who, like Moses, was to restore them to liberty and prosperity, and deliver them from their enemies, this one thing was essential to establish, in order to ensure the reception of their doctrines among the Jewish nation, and give full force to their teachings among the people, namely, a recognition and acknowledgment of a MESSIAH, from whom all their doctrines were to emanate. To carry out this object, so essential to the extension of their doctrines and the success of their mission, they chose among the various aspirants to the Messiahship, *one Jesus*, who, as Josephus relates, was looked on by the respectable classes to be insane, but by the poorer people, among whom were included the Essenians, was considered to be endued with a divine spirit and a prophetic character; his patience, his meekness, and humility were so consonant to the doctrines the Essenians taught.

The original account of this obscure individual, seized on by enthusiasts of the Essenian Sect, as a type of the Messiah, was worked up into a religious system, and embodied in all the severe discipline, self-mortification, fastings, prayers, contemplations, and visions of these ascetics; and variations of this work, written many years after, appeared, under the designation of Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

REVIEW OF THE PROGRESS OF CHRISTIANITY.

THE followers of Jesus were dismayed by the catastrophe which terminated his career, after all his lofty promises of redeeming Israel. But their hopes were not extinguished by this unforeseen event; for having abandoned all for his cause, they still comforted themselves with the hopes of his re-appearance, from what he had obscurely stated about his "second coming," which he had expressly limited to the present generation. (Matt. xvi. 28.) Many flattered themselves that they would yet see him coming in the clouds, with great glory, to restore their oppressed nation, and sit on the throne of David. They resolved therefore to persevere, and agreed to teach that Jesus had risen from the dead. (Acts ii. 22—40.)

Accordingly they spread reports of his having appeared to them in different places. Their object for so anxiously urging this was obvious, as without it their cause must have been given up. A crucified malefactor was not the Messiah of the prophets; but, that he had risen from the dead, had appeared unto many, and was soon again to come in glory was a very different matter,—he might still be the Messiah.

Even this very stumbling-block of Jesus' ignominious death was afterwards made use of by Paul and others; and, on this was raised that extraordinary doctrine that the death of Jesus was an atonement for the original sin of Adam,

which had perpetuated on all his posterity an indelible offence against the Almighty Creator.

All that was required of the converts, at this time, was merely a belief in Christ, and an immersion in water with promise of repentance. It does not appear that a belief in a Trinity, or the Godhead of Jesus, or Original Sin, or an Atonement, was required of them. Jesus was merely announced to them "as a man" (Acts ii. 22), and this was the Jewish belief of their expected Messiah. They looked for a man of sufficient power and influence to deliver them from the Roman yoke; and it is clear, that the first disciples adhered to Jesus *only*, because they believed that he was soon to come as a victorious prince, under whom they expected, according to his promise, places and preferment in the kingdom he was about to establish.

The Essenians, and other Jewish converts, were of the lowest and most illiterate class, and the peculiar attention paid to their temporal wants and necessities, operated materially in procuring accession to this new religion. A community of goods, "paradise for the poor, hell for the rich," and the announcement of a kingdom about to commence, where peace, and plenty, and happiness would reign for ever; these were powerful attractions for the indigent and poverty-stricken. It consoled the wretched, and was announced as peculiarly destined for the poor, the afflicted, and diseased. Every one who embraced it was sure of a subsistence; and the belief of the end of the world being at hand made the opulent indifferent to wealth, which they were not long to enjoy, powerfully united the minds of men, and detached them from the concerns of the world.

Besides, their own Mythology disposed the Gentiles to adopt this new religion. It admitted of a heaven and a hell, miraculous conceptions, gods incarnate, trinities, resurrec-

tions, descents into hell, ascents into heaven, diabolical possessions,—with angels, demons, oracles, miracles, and legends analogous to the Christians.

On the other hand, their rash and indiscreet announcement of the approaching overthrow of the Roman power, caused them to be regarded as ill-disposed to the government. Hence one great cause of the persecutions with which they were visited by the Romans, and which they bore with so much fortitude. But the merit of these martyrs has been absurdly extolled, as proofs of the truth of Christianity. For, as we have shewn, miracles as well as martyrs have been distinguished, all over the world, in favour of false as of true religions, and are therefore no proofs of the truth of any religion, but merely of the faith and fanaticism of its votaries.

The success of Peter and his followers in making converts, even with the powerful aid of Paul, was by no means equal to their expectations; and it was at Antioch that Paul first resolved to give up the attempt as fruitless. Being violently opposed by the rich and respectable Jews, he shook off the dust of his feet against them, and resolved in future to attempt the conversion of the Gentiles. (Acts xiii. 46—51.)

It is very doubtful whether, without the co-operation of Paul, Christianity ever would have extended beyond the limits of Judæa. He had, at an early period, advanced himself to be the leader of the party, and looked with great contempt on his poor ignorant coadjutors, who possessed no one qualification to carry out the new religion except their fanatic zeal and enthusiasm. He accordingly assumed the name and character of an apostle, and compelled the others silently to acquiesce in the admission of the heathen or Gentiles to

the new religion ; a measure which all the immediate followers of Jesus strongly condemned, as directly opposed to the instructions and commands of Jesus himself.

Paul soon perceived, that the religious views of Jesus were ill adapted to the conventional habits of society, and impracticable as a general system. He therefore set about their reform, which, however, ended in his creating an entirely new system of religion. He felt the impossibility of persuading the people into a belief that a crucified Jew could be the promised Messiah, which proved, as he himself acknowledged, "unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness." (1 Cor. i: 23.) He did not hesitate to lay aside the genealogical descent of Jesus from David, and to give out, agreeably to the example of the times, that Jesus was divinely begotten of God, as was Plato and Pythagoras, and other founders of new religions ; and his announcement, that Jesus' death was an atonement or satisfaction to God for all the sins of man, who was "justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law ; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified," (Gal. ii. 16.)—these were most satisfactory and acceptable doctrines, both to Jew and Gentile, rich and poor.

The precepts and example of Jesus inculcated the most rigid self-denial, the utmost contempt for the things of this world, and an abhorrence of all wealth, power, and dignities. Paul, on the contrary, for the purpose of bringing over the wealthy and opulent, modified all these extreme views. In opposition to Jesus' commands to offer no resistance, but if a man was struck on the one cheek, to turn the other also,—Paul taught, that resistance and anger were allowable. "Be ye angry and sin not ; let not the sun go down upon your wrath." (Ephes. iv. 26.) For all the wrongs he suffered at

the hands of Alexander the coppersmith, he prayed "the Lord to reward him *according to his works!*" (2 Tim. iv. 14.)

Paul soon found, that he had to deviate considerably from the quiet and passive submission inculcated by Jesus, who, in his anxiety to provide for the *spirit*, had lost sight of the things of the *flesh*; he saw that the world would soon be at an end, if Jesus' commands were implicitly followed, and had to acknowledge, in opposition to his command, "to take no thought for the morrow," that however sedulous providence might be, a proper attention to the concerns of this world was our bounden duty; for if we took no thought for the morrow, the morrow would take little thought for us, and that however abounding in faith we might be, mountains were not to be moved by the mere volition of the faithful.

Jesus taught the belief in one God; but Paul, with John who was a Platonist, despoiled his religion of all its unity and simplicity, by the introduction of the Incomprehensible Trinity of Plato, or *Triad* of the East; and by deifying two of God's attributes, namely, His Holy Spirit, or the *Agion Pneuma* of Plato, and his Divine Intelligence, called by Plato the *Logos*, or Word, and applied under this form to Jesus.* (John i.)

It is now universally acknowledged that the *Epistles* were written before the *Gospels*; and that, at the time the *Epistles* were written, the *Gospels* were not in existence.

* The doctrines of Plato must ever be viewed with a degree of interest and curiosity, as containing the origin of the Christian theology; for there is no doubt that the Platonic philosophy was the parent stock of the Trinitarian belief, and may be pursued regularly from Plato, through the schools of Alexandria, to the Gospel of John. (See the *Timæus* of Plato.)

Modern Christianity is therefore the religion of the Epistles, and contains very few of the religious views of the Gospels. For the sum and substance of the religion of the Gospels is simply a belief in the Messiahship of Jesus, with a change of heart and baptism.

The Epistles of Paul and others are therefore only deserving of notice, as containing the principal doctrines of *Modern Christianity*; and in these are to be found the origin of all the strange and anti-christian doctrines that have mystified and disturbed the world for nearly the last two thousand years, under the names of the innumerable and conflicting sects that have sprung up amongst us—all professing to be followers of Jesus, and all differing widely, both from his doctrines and from each other. To Paul the world is indebted for the doctrines of the Divinity of Jesus, the Trinity, Original Sin, the Atonement, Justification by Faith, Predestination, Reprobation, Free Will, and Election,—all of which, with perhaps the exception of the last, were unknown in the time of Jesus.

Belsham, in his work on Paul's Epistles, pronounces him to be "an inaccurate reasoner, an incorrect writer, and a superficial metaphysician; and his insincerity often too apparent." Paul himself acknowledges, nay glories in it, that he did not hesitate to adopt dissimulation, and other unworthy means, to attain his object, and to gain over converts.

"Unto the Jews, I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as without law, that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak, became I as weak, that I might gain the weak. I am made all things to all men." (1 Cor. ix. 20—22.)

Many of the early Christian sects looked on Paul as an

impostor, and the Acts and Epistles "as idle tales and un-inspired reveries." They were rejected, as of no authority, by the Nazarenes and Ebionites (Jesus' first followers), who looked on Paul as an usurper, who had made use of Christ to carry out his own fanatic projects and ambitious views. They were also rejected by the Cerdonites, Marcionites, Encratites, and other Christian societies of the second century, and by the Manicheans in the third century. (*Theology displayed.*)

Two great and influential principles characterized the progress of Christianity, to which it owed much of its success, namely, *the necessity of deceiving the vulgar, and the duty of perpetuating ignorance.* The early Christians had the authority of Jesus himself for carrying out these principles, who taught the people in obscure parables, that, as he explained it: "Seeing they may see, and not perceive, and hearing they may hear, and not understand." Paul, whose fourteen Epistles make up nearly the sum of Christianity, repeatedly inculcates and avows this principle of deceiving the people, and talks of being upbraided by his converts "with being crafty, and catching them with guile" (2 Cor. xii. 16); of his known and wilful lies abounding to the glory of God (Rom. iii.) ; and, in the most explicit language, maintains the necessity of extreme ignorance in order to attain celestial wisdom. He glories in the power of the Almighty, in destroying the wisdom of the wise, and bringing to nothing the understanding of the prudent (1 Cor. i. 19) ; and warns them to beware, lest any man spoil them through philosophy and vain deceit. (Col. ii. 8.)

Peter also inculcates the necessity of the most absolute prostration of the understanding, as necessary to the reception of Divine knowledge. And the pious and orthodox

Tertullian, glorying in the principles of the Christian faith, enthusiastically exclaims: "I reverence it, because it is contemptible; I adore it, because it is absurd; I believe it, because it is impossible." (*Tertul. de Carne Christi.*)

In the FIRST CENTURY, so obscure had Jesus' life been, and so little known were his views, even among his immediate followers, that feuds commenced in the Christian Church, even during the time of the apostles themselves, regarding the nature of Jesus and the admission of the Gentiles.

Among the early Christians, some sects (the Docetæ) believed that Jesus had no actual existence,—“existed in appearance, but not in reality.” Others (Cotelerius) that the body of Jesus was “a mere phantom;” and many (Cerdon) believed that Jesus appeared as a man, without passing through birth, childhood, or youth; but shewed himself for the first time at Galilee, ready prepared for his mission; others (Faustus) maintained that Jesus was not born of the Virgin Mary; and the Arians altogether denied his divinity; the Basilidians denied his crucifixion, but that Judas was really crucified, and Jesus taken up into heaven by four angels. In fact, the early Christians appear to have known nothing certain about Jesus, the fancy of each individual supplying the place of reality, and ultimately became the reality.—On such foundation did Christianity repose.

In short, so numerous were *heretics* (Christians of different opinions) in the first and second centuries, and so obscurely had this assumed Revelation been given to man, that Bishop Marsh observes, “All the primitive Christians seem to have been included under one or other denomination of heresy.” And Bishop Stillingfleet declares, “That there was not a

book of our New Testament, whose authority was not called in question by some heretics of the first ages."

At first the early Christians regarded Jesus simply as a man inspired of God; then as a being more perfect than others; they then gave him a place above the angels, as Paul tells us; every day added to his greatness, until in time he became an "Emanation from the Deity." But this was not enough, they at last acknowledged him to be born before time, to have existed before the creation of the world, and at length he was elevated to the Godhead, and declared to be "God consubstantiate with God." But as Eusebius, Bishop of Cæsarea, remarks, "it took three entire ages to form the *Apotheosis of Jesus*, evidently following the examples of the pagans."

In the SECOND CENTURY new contentions arose on the subject of the divinity, co-divinity, and humanity of Jesus, which created sharp contentions and noisy controversies.

Of the early churches, the most remarkable were the Ebionites and the Nazarenes (Essenian Jews), the followers of Paul, and the Cerinthians, the Nicolaitans, the Basilidians, &c. The Ebionites and Nazarenes formed a numerous body among the professors of Christianity, and denied the miraculous conception of Jesus. They both considered Jesus to be a mere man, and maintained the perpetual obligation of the law of Moses. Now these two sects were *Jesus' own converts*, and this fact goes far to prove what Jesus' own opinion of himself was, *that he was a mere man*; and that his miraculous conception and divinity were after-fabrications. They not only rejected the four Gospels received by the Paulites, but had a Gospel of their own, to which Paul alludes with such horror in his Epistle to the Galatians. (Jones' Eccl. Researches.)

In the THIRD CENTURY, we find the Christian world in a very different aspect from what is represented; for what with the worldly ambition of the priests, the absurd subtleties of controversy, and endless schisms and contentions, all peace, love, and charity were withdrawn from the world. After the Council of Nice, the Eastern Churches were engaged in perpetual disputes. In the Western Churches contests for the Episcopal seat at Rome were carried to such a height, that they came to open violence and murder. —The Collyridians introduced the Virgin Mary as a God, and worshipped her as such, declaring her to be the Queen of Heaven and Mother of God. This notion of the divinity of the Virgin Mary was also believed by many at the Council of Nice, who declared there were two Gods besides the Father and Holy Ghost, viz. Jesus and the Virgin; and were thence termed *Marianites*. Others declared her to be exempt from humanity, and deified. (Sales Quoran.)

In the FOURTH CENTURY, numerous proscriptions and assassinations occurred, particularly at Alexandria, where the zeal of Athanasius, in behalf of the Trinity, became furious against Arius, Eusebius, and all that party, who denied that doctrine—a doctrine that has cost the world thousands of lives, and which may be said to have been written in blood. (Mosheim's Eccl. Hist.) At this period it was an almost universally-adopted maxim, that it was an act of virtue to deceive and lie, when, by such means, the interest of the church might be promoted. They looked on the attainment of these objects to be sanctified by any means, declaring "that the end sanctified the means."

In the FIFTH CENTURY, the ignorance and simplicity of the generality of men furnished the most favourable occasions for the exercise of fraud; and the impudence of

impostors, in contriving false miracles, was artfully proportioned to the credulity of the vulgar.

"It is certain (says Mosheim) that the greatest part, both of the bishops and presbyters in the Early Church, were men entirely destitute of learning and education. Besides, that savage and illiterate party, who looked upon all sort of erudition, particularly that of a philosophic kind, as pernicious and destructive of true piety and religion, increased both in numbers and authority. The ascetics, monks, and hermits augmented the strength of this barbarous faction; and not only the women, but also all who mistook solemn looks, sordid garments, and a love of solitude for real piety (and in this number were comprised the generality of mankind), were vehemently prepossessed in their favour." (Eccl. Hist.)

Thus, entering on the FIFTH CENTURY, we have the surest and most unequivocal demonstrations, that Christianity, as a religion distinct from paganism, had gained no extensive footing in the world; and its progress was attained by the most unjust and unworthy means. After that period, all that there was of religion merged in the palpable obscure of the dark ages. The pretence of an argument, that there was anything either miraculous or extraordinary, in the propagation or progress of Christianity, is in defiance of all evidence and reason whatever. (Taylor's Diegesis.)

During the succeeding eight hundred years, even till the time of the Reformation, there was no safety for the people but in the bosom of the Roman Church, and no alternative but to be born, and educated, and die in its holy communion. As all in the ark were saved, and all out of it were drowned, so was it proclaimed in regard to the church; and all out of its pale were denounced as reprobates and out-

casts. During this long and dreary period, generation after generation passed away, and mankind were born and baptized, and confessed, and anointed; and starved, and whipped, and tortured, and burned,—till the most perfect uniformity prevailed throughout Christendom.—*And thus was Christianity permanently established!*

During all this period, when Popery and the Inquisition reigned triumphant, the people were forced to be satisfied with Christianity without inquiry and without examination; and were bound to receive any explanation of Scripture from their priests without hesitation or a murmur. But, notwithstanding all the restrictions imposed, there were many men who still ventured to brave the fire and the rack, and to express their distrust and suspicion of the existing religion.

But even this liberty was not long tolerated; for the strong arm of the Roman Church—at that period rapidly consolidating—soon established a complete uniformity, by rendering the Scriptures a sealed book, prohibiting the reading of them to the laity altogether, and limiting their interpretation to the priests alone. They declared that the Bible was an obscure and dangerous work, unintelligible without the aid of an infallible guide—the clergy! *

* It is curious that Christians are indebted to the despotic acts of the Romish Church for the preservation and universal adoption of the received Protestant Bible of the present day! The reader may fancy the innumerable alterations and interpolations it must have undergone, in the exclusive hands of the monks for above *one thousand years*; and how doubtful of acceptation it must now be, after having passed through such impure, unworthy, and dishonest hands.—To the same power is attributed the notorious interpolations in the ancient MSS. of the New Testaments, of several remarkable passages, viz. Matt. xvi. 17, 19; xxvi. 32; Mark xiv. 28; xvi. 15, 20. John xxi.

For nearly two hundred years after the Reformation the leaven of priestcraft still continued fermenting; and it was considered, by the Protestant churches, a crime worse than sacrilege, to dispute the divinity of any of the books of the New Testament.* Full two centuries elapsed before Protestants ventured to return to the same liberty of thinking as the primitive Christians, and, up to the present time, a searching and conscientious inquiry has gone on, steadily progressing, in the investigation of the truth and genuineness of Scripture; and, through the liberality of the present age, liberty of conscience and right of private judgment are in general respected.

Nothing displays more clearly the human origin and structure of the Christian religion, than a careful survey of its past history. The continual and repeated transitions and changes it has been forced to undergo, to accommodate itself to times and circumstances, display its human structure, and show, that it possesses within itself the seeds of dissolution and decay, exhibiting in these various throes, mere efforts of the system to preserve itself in existence.

1 John v. 7; 1 Tim. iii. 16; Rev. i. 11; all of which (says Zach. Jackson) are abominable forgeries to deceive mankind, and diabolical inventions perverting the Christian religion.

* The introduction of printing, in 1474, caused such alarm among the clergy, that the then Bishop of London, in a convocation of his clergy, declared, "If we do not destroy this dangerous invention, it will one day destroy us."—The bishop seemed to have been endued with the gift of prophecy!

CHAPTER XXXV.

REVIEW OF THE PRESENT STATE OF CHRISTIANITY.

“ HOWEVER pleasing the task to describe religion as “ she descended from heaven, arrayed in all her native “ purity, yet, alas, a more melancholy duty is imposed on “ the historian. He must discover the inevitable mixture of “ error and corruption which she contracted, in a long residence on earth, among a weak and degenerate race.”— (*Gibbon's Rome.*)

The New Testament is declared to be a Revelation from the all-wise Creator, on the belief of which the salvation of man depends. Now if it be of such vast importance, we should naturally expect to find it in harmony and keeping in all its parts, and to be so distinctly expressed, that there could be but one meaning extracted from it, and no mistaking that meaning. But what do we in truth find? Why, that since it has been first promulgated, it has been a bone of contention among the whole Christian world for nearly two thousand years, and no appearance of any amicable adjustment; and so obscurely has it been written, that scarcely two can agree on the meaning or interpretation of any important passage.

It would be endless to enumerate the various and contradictory opinions respecting God and his attributes, all equally deduced from this work, and which distract and con-

found so many sincere and well-meaning persons, Dr Lardner candidly acknowledges, that when John, in his first Epistle, taught that Christ was the Son of God, and that he came in the flesh, he meant to oppose those who denied his divinity, as well as those who affirmed that Jesus' body was only a body in appearance,—acknowledging the dubiety and uncertainty of the subject, even in the time of the apostles, and how little his very disciples knew of him.

In a revelation thus professing to emanate from God himself, his own nature ought surely to be stated so clearly as to leave no room for doubt or uncertainty. On this important point, however, awful differences of opinion prevail.

The TRINITARIANS find in the Bible that there is One God in three persons, each of whom is God,—hence there are three Gods in one. These three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, they call the Holy Trinity.—The UNITARIANS, on the other hand, find in the Bible, that the Father alone is God; and as for the Son, they unite in denying his Godhead, and also the Godhead of the Holy Ghost.

Now this difference of opinion involves the most serious consequences; for, if Trinitarianism be true, “Unitarians must be guilty of *blasphemy*, as being rebels to their God, in degrading the Lord that bought them.” (*Le Mesurier's Bampton Lectures*.)—And if Unitarianism be true, then “we who offer him (Jesus) that homage which is due to God alone, are, without doubt, as really guilty of *idolatry* as the worshippers of the deified heroes of Greece and Rome.”—(*Wardlaw's Disc.*)

These two sects, therefore, regard each other with deadly horror. Dr South, in his sermons, calls the Unitarians “impious blasphemers, whose infamous pedigree runs back from wretch to wretch in a direct line to the devil himself; and

who are fitter to be crushed by the civil magistrate, as destructive to government and society, than to be confuted as merely heretics in religion."—The Unitarians, on the other hand, contend "that the doctrine of a Trinity is absolutely inconsistent with the principles of reason; and that it is just as reasonable, and less mischievous, to believe in Transubstantiation, as to believe that three distinct persons are but one individual being,—that a son can be as old as his father,—and that a being who was born and died, is *the uncreated and immortal God*. (*Lindsey's Christian Idolatry*.) On this ground, says Dean Swift, the Unitarians must reject the miracles also, for there is not one of them which, if strictly examined, is not as much contrary to common reason as this doctrine of the Trinity.*

But further, the Unitarians insist "that if the Bible really maintained this absurd and corrupt doctrine of *three co-equal Gods* in one substance,—it would be an unanswerable argument *that it never came from God*; and that Unitarianism is the only form of worship that could preserve Christianity alive in the world." (*Lindsey*.)—On the other side, the Trinity is declared by its advocates to be "the very foundation of Christianity, and that without the belief of it,

* Origen advanced the opinion, "that the Holy Spirit was created by the Son—by the Word;"—Eusebius taught, "that the Spirit was neither of Father nor Son." Origen argued, "that the Son is as much below the Father as he and the Holy Ghost are above the most noble creatures." The fact was that nobody knew anything about it. All talked of it, but no one understood it. The solution, however, was simple—it was a *mystery*, and that solved all doubts and satisfied all scruples. Metaphysics have this great advantage over all other sciences, they require no previous study, and no troublesome preliminaries.

a man can no more be a Christian than he can be a man without a rational soul; and that if Christ be only a man, the Scriptures must be false, and Christ and his disciples and apostles be ranked among the greatest hypocrites and impostors that ever appeared on earth." (*Dean Tucker's View.*)

Each party is no less positive as to the clearness of its own system in the Bible. "So unanswerably evident is the Unitarian scheme, that the man who will not believe it does not believe the Scriptures, and is a real infidel." (*Bible Christ.*) "The Trinity (says Lindsey) is expressly contrary to above 2000 texts in the Old, and above 1000 in the New Testament."

The Trinitarians, on the other hand, say "that the Trinity is one of the clearest, as well as one of the most decisively Scripture doctrines in the world; and the famous Postal observed, that there were 11,000 proofs of the Trinity in the Old Testament, interpreted rightly." (*Jortin*, iii.)—The Unitarians, however, say that they cannot discover a single trace of it from Genesis to Revelations!

The celebrated Dr Channing is of opinion, "that if the doctrine of a *Triune God* be true, undoubtedly from its difficulty, its singularity, and its importance, it would be stated with great clearness, defined with the utmost precision, and guarded with all possible care from the objections to which it is so freely open, and from the misconceptions to which it is obviously liable." Now if this argument be valid, in disproof of the Trinity, it surely is still more valid in disproof of the divine authority of the Bible itself, from which all these obscure doctrines emanate.

"The idea of a God-man (says Eusebius, Bishop of Cæsarea) is monstrous; for the distance from God to man is

infinite, and it is impossible for a perishable body to be infinite or eternal." "It is, however, most certain (says Lindsey) that when men of sceptical minds see that the learned professors of the Gospel cannot agree whether one person be God or three persons, they are rendered averse to the whole system of revelation,—they look on it to be all a riddle and uncertainty, and turn away from it."

THE MIRACULOUS CONCEPTION of Christ is rejected by the Unitarians, "as a fiction equally absurd with that of Jupiter and Danaë." (*Belsham's Inq.*) HIS INCARNATION, "when a virgin daughter produced her father, and a creature her Creator," is denounced also as "a blasphemous impiety." (*Evanson's Reply.*) "No sooner was Christ's Incarnation preached, but it was almost as quickly denied, even by those who pretended to be his disciples,"—and SIR ISAAC NEWTON has predicted, "that the time will come when this doctrine shall be exploded as an absurdity equal to Transubstantiation." (Letters to Calvinists.) "This prediction has long since been verified; for in every view of the subject, the *incarnation* of God is not less absurd and ridiculous than the *impanation* of God, or God in a bit of bread! Nay, the Scripture proofs are incomparably stronger for the latter than the former." (*Theol. Doubts.*)

The existence of GOD THE HOLY GHOST, the Lord and giver of life, has been vehemently contested. "They say (exclaim the opponents of this doctrine) the SPIRIT is a person and God. Did God then assume the shape of a dove, that is, of a brute? What hinders them from believing all the transformations in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*?" (*Leslie.*) "All manner of sin and blasphemy (says Jesus) shall be forgiven unto men" (very encouraging indeed!), "but the sin against the Holy Ghost shall never be forgiven." (Matt.

xii. 31.) What is this unexplained and undefined crime that is never to be forgiven? Twenty different opinions on this awful offence, *so carefully concealed from us*, could be produced; but they are all mere conjectures; and we are left, on this astounding subject, to grope our way in the dark!

The next heavenly personage is the BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, who is fervently worshipped by the Catholics as "the Mother of God, and Queen of Heaven!" Yet the Protestants denounce this worship as "the grossest idolatry that perhaps was ever committed in the world; such as no Christian can think of without horror, nor any partake of without the hazard of his salvation. (*Abp. Wakes' Ch. Catechism.*) The worship of SAINTS in the Catholic Church is regarded by all Protestants "as idolatrous, destroying the intent of religion, and silently bringing back to Christianity the heathen multitude of deities." (*Porteus's Confut.*) Precisely similar language is retorted on Bishop Porteus and the Trinitarians for worshipping Christ and the Holy Ghost. "Their worship is idolatrous,—it is a deviation from the Gospels of the most criminal kind." (*Serious Address.*)

ORIGINAL SIN.—Horne maintains the reality of the FALL OF MAN, and the introduction of sin into the world by Adam, and says, "that the whole scheme of Redemption by Christ is founded upon it, and must stand or fall with it." Fellowes and Wright call it "an impious, absurd, and unscriptural fiction; which impugns the perfectibility of the Deity in creating an imperfect work;" and after declaring it to be *very good*, that this very good work began at once to sin against its Maker!

AN ATONEMENT for the sin of Adam by the blood of Christ, is so clear (says *Bishop Magee*) and so intimately

blended with the general tenor of divinity, that they who object to it must go one step further, and discard at once the whole evidence of Scripture. Its opponents, however, say that "it is an impious and antichristian doctrine, highly injurious to the glory of the divine attributes, and absolutely irreconcilable to the most obvious dictates of that reason which God himself has given us; that *not a word* is advanced on the subject from the beginning to the end of the New Testament; and that, if it could be proved to be contained in the Gospels, it would prove *that Revelation is a cheat, and Christianity a forgery.*" (*Belsham's Christ. Reform.*)

TRANSUBSTANTIATION.—The Mass of the Catholics is founded on this doctrine, "which," says Daniel O'Connell, "as there is no sweeter tenet of Christianity, so there is none founded on more clear, convincing, and indeed *demonstrative* arguments." Now, by the word of the priest, the bread and wine are said to be instantaneously changed into the real and substantial body and blood of Christ, and then become an object of worship; and, when offered up by the priest, they are a propitiatory sacrifice for the living and the dead. "These are all," according to the Articles, "blasphemous fables, and dangerous deceits;" and "downright idolatry" according to all Protestants; while the Quaker obstinately contends, "that neither Mass nor the Lord's Supper were ever instituted by Christ or his apostles." (*Theology Displayed.*)

"Should I (says Dr Trapp) find in the Bible such a proposition as this,—that a piece of bread is really and truly a human body, or that the same body can be in ten thousand places at once, I could not believe it,—God could not affirm this. Nay, should I see a man raise the dead and declare the above proposition to be true, I could not

believe him, because I know the thing to be impossible in reason and nature." In vain does the Catholic remind the Protestant that he is rejecting the testimony and authority of millions in favour of this doctrine; that he must believe, if he be a Christian, that God was carried in procession by the Jews in a box; that the Bible miracles are contrary to reason, nature, and the senses; and that he believes in such anti-rational doctrines as the Conception, Incarnation, &c. From these enormous discrepancies among Christians, all founded on the Bible, Scripture authority is abundantly produced by their votaries.

BAPTISM is renounced by the Quakers and some other Sects; who thus deprive themselves of that absolving and regenerating power which the Church of England attributes to the Sacraments. To the EXTREME UNCTION of the Catholics great importance is attached, as also to the worship of IMAGES; but these are rejected by all Protestants "as idolatrous and unscriptural." The entire abandonment of PUBLIC WORSHIP was ably vindicated by the late learned and conscientious Gilbert Wakefield, on Scriptural principles. This recalls to the mind the prophecy of the celebrated Sir Thomas More, "that the time would come, when men will account no more of PRAYER than they do of their old shoes."

Thus, with respect to the *object* as well as the *mode* of worship of God, Christians labour under total uncertainty. What appears to some essential to acceptable worship, is rejected by others as pregnant with destructive superstition, and hostile to all genuine devotion.

The various opinions "on the nature of the person of Jesus," are few in comparison with those which relate to the "means and measures of God's favour." These (says

the Rev. J. Evans), have been the source of endless contentions and controversies; and which, however contradictory, may all be supported by Scripture texts of the most plausible aspect. That this is the case is evident from the innumerable sects and parties into which Christianity is divided—each laying claim to exclusive sanction and authority from the Bible—each declaring his own views right, and all who differ from him wrong.

The Trinitarian denounces the Unitarian, and the Unitarian the Trinitarian; and both unite in condemning the Roman Catholic.

The Arminians denounce the Calvinist's views, "as a system consisting of human creatures without liberty, doctrine without sense, faith without reason, and a God without mercy." (*Archd. Jortin.*)

The Calvinists on the other hand, represent Arminianism as "delusive, dangerous, and ruinous to immortal souls" (*Close's Sermons*), and the Unitarians declare them both "to be a mischievous compound of impiety and idolatry." (*Disc. on Priestly.*)

Again, Archbishop Magee denounces the Unitarian system as "embracing the most daring impieties that ever disgraced the name of Christianity;" and declares, that "if Unitarianism be well-founded, Christianity must be an imposition."

All sects join in denouncing the Methodists "as misled fanatics, alienated from all knowledge of the true God." (*Divine Truth.*)

The Church of England denounces the whole body of dissenters, "as accursed, devoted to the devil, and separated from Christ," (Canon v. vii.), and the Bishop of London (*Letters on Dissent*) denounced the dissenters "to be actu-

ated by the devil, with the curse of God resting heavily on them all."

The dissenters are not slow in retaliating on the Church of England, declaring it to be "an obstacle to the progress of truth and holiness in the land, that it destroys more souls than it saves, and that its end is most devoutly to be wished for by every lover of God and man!" (*Christian Observer*.)

The Roman Catholics declare their Church to be "the only true one," and all the other sects join in denouncing her to be "the scarlet whore of Babylon," and a combination of idolatry, blasphemy, and devilism. (*Cuns. Apostasy*.) Whilst the Roman Catholics retort on the whole body of Protestants of every sect and description, consign them to eternal damnation as heretics and schismatics, and their clergy desecrated "as thieves and ministers of the devil." (*Rheims Test.*)

It would be endless to enumerate the names and tenets of the various sects which constitute that "chaos of confusion" denominated "the Christian Church," all derived from this one book, the Bible, which is declared to be an emanation from the Almighty, and a revelation of his will to man.

From the rapid advancement of civilization, and the increase in the wealth and luxuries of life, the clergy of modern times have found it necessary to make further changes and modifications in the religion of Jesus, so as to accommodate it to their own views and the peculiarities of the times. The name of Jesus Christ is still assumed as the foundation of their religion; but little attention is paid either to his precepts or example. The legend of modern Christianity might with great truth and justice be written

STAT NOMINIS UMBRA, for, in reality, only the shadow of the name of Jesus' religion now remains !

After reading the above can the reader hesitate to acknowledge, that a religion so divided against itself cannot be a true religion, or be of divine origin ; or imagine how amidst such an infinite mass of obscure texts, contradictory opinions, and glaring discrepancies, all seriously derived from the pages of this book, a correct and useful system of religion can be formed.

Truth belongs to all times and all men. That the truth is not evident in Scripture is proved by the innumerable sects into which Christianity has split ; for when truth is clear and evident it is impossible to divide people into parties or factions. What would be the true religion if Christianity did not exist. That in which there would be no sects,—that in which all minds must necessarily agree,—sectarianism and error are but synonymous terms ; for “the word of God” can convey but one meaning. We would only ask how many meanings have the Scriptures, the assumed word of God, conveyed,—count the different sects !

People in all ages, from the inborn delight which man derives from the wonderful and mysterious, have, at all times and in all places, been readily persuaded to lend their belief to the supernatural and the invisible. Hence one great cause of the enormous superstructure in the Christian religion, of prophecies and miracles, of dreams and visions, of angels and devils, and other supernatural and invisible agents, which have been worked up into the few simple precepts of the mild and retiring Jesus.

But what will most of all astonish posterity is, that in this enlightened age, and in England too, an ignorant old

woman (Johanna Southcott) should have collected 50,000 believers in her new doctrine of Christian salvation; of having had intercourse with invisible and superior powers, and of being impregnated miraculously, as a virgin, with a second Shiloh—an incarnation and type of Jesus. Who then, after this outrage on common sense, can be surprised at the credulity of people 2000 years ago.

“But we all,” says the author of *Popular Delusions*, “pay an involuntary homage to antiquity, ‘a blind homage,’ as Bacon calls it,” which tends greatly to the obstruction of truth. To the great majority of mortal eyes, time sanctifies everything it does not destroy. To call a prejudice ‘time-hallowed’ is to open a way for it into hearts where it never before penetrated. Thus it is with human belief: and thus it is we bring shame upon our intellects, in lending our belief to the marvellously false, and withholding our credit from the philosophically true.”

When the sailor, on being questioned by his mother as to the wonders he had seen abroad, declared “that he had seen fish flying in the air,” and confirmed it by the most serious attestations, the old lady turned a deaf ear to him. But when he added that in the Red Sea they had fished up a large wheel, made of gold, and covered with jewels, supposed to be one of the wheels of Pharaoh’s chariot, as described in Exodus, she at once gave her willing assent to the truth of it, *because it was written in Scripture*.

Such old women are, alas! by no means rare in the world. Every age and country abound in them. They have been found in high places, and have sat down amongst the learned of the earth. Instances must be familiar to every reader in which the same person was willing, with eager credulity, to swallow the most extravagant fictions and yet

refused credence to a philosophic fact. The same Greeks who believed readily that their God, "Almighty Jove," wooed Leda in the form of a swan, denied that there were any physical causes for storms of thunder and lightning; and treated as impious those who attempted to explain the phenomena of nature on other than religious grounds.

Who does not remember the outcry against the science of geology (it has hardly yet subsided), because it militated against the early Scripture narratives. Its professors were impiously and absurdly accused of designing to hurl the Creator from his throne; they were charged with sapping the foundation of religion, and of propping up atheism by the aid of science.

Misdirected zeal in matters of religion induce many to decry a newly discovered truth, either because the Bible contains no allusion to it, or because it appears to militate against some preconceived religious doctrine. The old woman could not believe in flying fish, because her Bible did not tell her so, but readily believed that her son had fished up in the Red Sea the chariot-wheel of Pharaoh, because her Bible had taught her that Pharaoh and all his host were drowned there. And our over-righteous old women obstinately refuse their assent to the important and scientific discoveries of the present day, because they happen to jar against some fondly-cherished and time-hallowed delusion of their forefathers.

Upon similar principles, Christians believed that the devil appeared visibly among men, and tempted them from their allegiance to heaven,—that any man could command his presence by writing his name backwards in his own blood,—and that such virtue resided in the relics of departed saints, that the most wonderful miracles were wrought,

simply by the touch. Yet the same people would not believe Galileo, when he proved that the earth turned round the sun, because the contrary was declared in Scripture. And Kepler too, when he asserted the same fact, could gain no credence; but when he prophesied future events, told fortunes by the stars, and cast nativities, the whole town flocked around him.

When Harvey first promulgated his discovery of the circulation of the blood, every tongue was let loose against him. Yet the same people firmly believed in witches riding on broomsticks, that a dead man's hand would cure a burn, and the royal touch, the scrofula.

Who has not heard of the insane outrage against common sense and humanity perpetrated by the orthodox clergy, when that invaluable blessing, *chloroform*, was first introduced to the world, for the alleviation of pain in surgical operations and in parturition. It was denounced from the pulpit as an invention of Satan, and a thwarting of the decrees of the Almighty, who had expressly declared in Genesis to our first parents, that in pain and sorrow they should bring forth children, and which curse was to be perpetuated on all their posterity.

Who has not heard of the philosophic Brahmin, who believed it a deadly sin to eat anything that possessed life; and on beholding, through a microscope, a drop of the Ganges water, that he used daily with his food, swarming with insects, suddenly seized the instrument and dashed it to pieces. When called on for an explanation of this strange conduct, he said, "as my knowledge increased so did my pleasure, until I beheld this last wonder of the microscope. Now my mind is tormented with doubts and fears, in the midst of millions all happy in their ignorance. But thank

